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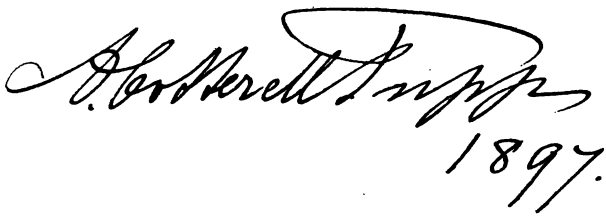

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WILD LIFE AND ADVENTURE

IN THE

AUSTRALIAN BUSH.

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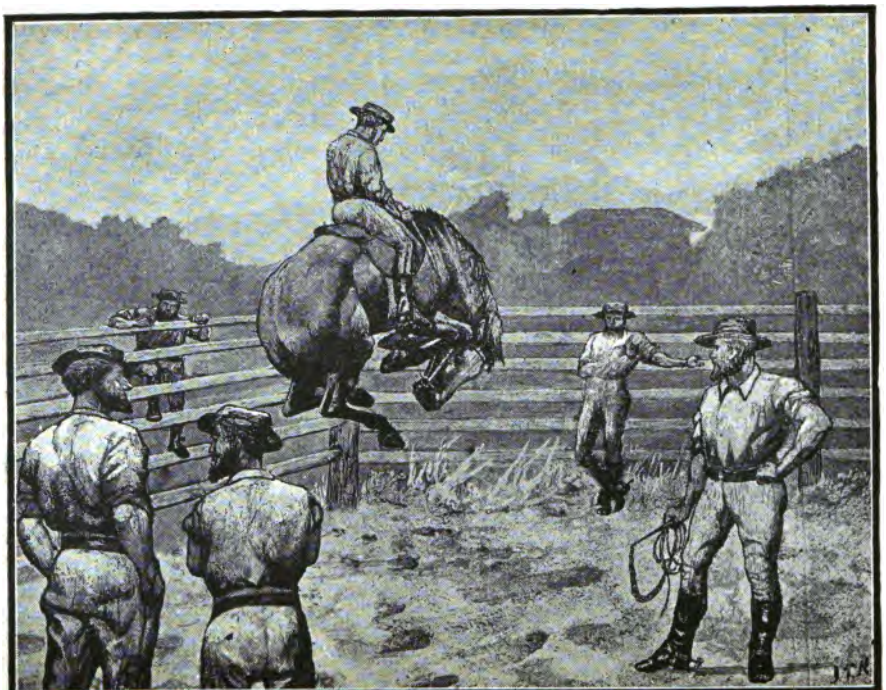

Frontispiece, Vol. i.] MASTERING THE BUCK-JUMPER. [*See p.* 296.

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WILD LIFE AND ADVENTURE

IN THE

AUSTRALIAN BUSH:

FOUR YEARS' PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

BY

ARTHUR NICOLS, F.G.S., F.R.G.S.,

AUTHOR OF

"ZOOLOGICAL NOTES," "NATURAL HISTORY OF THE CARNIVORA," ETC.

WITH EIGHT FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS BY

JOHN T. NETTLESHIP.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1887.

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TO

PRINCE ALBERT VICTOR EDWARD OF WALES, K.G.,

THESE PAGES ARE, BY EXPRESS PERMISSION,

DEDICATED,

IN REMEMBRANCE OF

HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS' VISIT TO AUSTRALIA;

AND IN RECOGNITION OF THE DEEP INTEREST HE MANIFESTED

IN ALL THAT CONCERNS THE WELL-BEING AND

ADVANCEMENT OF THAT PORTION OF THE

QUEEN'S REALM.

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PREFACE.

AUSTRALIA is certain in the near future to increase in favour, as a field for enterprise, with such of our more robust and adventurous English youth, for whom there may be no sufficiently attractive career in the Old Country. Therefore an account of some of the dramatic scenes and picturesque incidents of life in the back Bush of Queensland may prove interesting, and may serve to draw attention to a noble territory, whose vast resources have scarcely been suspected until within the last few years.

These resources are waiting development at the hands of the vigorous manhood which the upper and middle classes can contribute in abundance towards the making of this part of the Queen's Realm.

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Should the following pages, which are based on my four years' experience of work in the Bush, induce some of the sons of the Mother-Country to carry their education, their intelligence, their energy, and their capital to Queensland, to lay the foundation of the new Empire of the English-speaking race in the Southern Hemisphere, my efforts to depict the country as I found it will have availed something.

I must acknowledge my indebtedness to my friend, John T. Nettleship—a traveller and naturalist, as well as a distinguished painter—for the drawings by which he has called into pictorial life some of the leading scenes and incidents.

A. N.

WATFORD,
January, 1887.

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WILD LIFE AND ADVENTURE

IN THE

AUSTRALIAN BUSH.

CHAPTER I.

Harold Bertram makes up his Mind to go to Australia—On Board the *Beautiful Star*—Going down Channel—Anchor pitched over the Bow—"Boxing the Compass"—A White Squall—Getting into the Trade Winds—Keene plays a Practical Joke—"Choog," the Pet of the Ship—"Flying-Fish"—On the Equator—Waterspouts—The Southern Cross—Want of Water—Rats—Rain at Last—Heavy Gale—Flight of the Albatross—Fishing for Albatross—The Phosphorescent Ocean—"Smelling the Land"—Sunrise over Tasmania—In Bass's Straits—Off Port Jackson—"Billy," the Convicts' Jailer—Sydney.

JOHN BERTRAM, a well-to-do Yorkshire gentleman, cultivated his own freehold of some eight hundred acres, and bred a considerable number of horses and cattle, as his forefathers had done for many generations before him.

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The Bertram family was of no mushroom growth, neither was it without honourable distinctions; for among its cherished heirlooms was the cavalry sabre which an ancestor had carried, when captain of a troop of Cromwell's horse, through the battle of Naseby. Later, a Bertram served under Nelson at the Nile and Trafalgar, and fell, fighting by the side of his chief, on the quarter-deck of the *Victory*.

The present owner of the family estate lived in our less stirring times; but would doubtless have given a good account of himself had he been called upon to lead into action the smart volunteer corps which he raised in 1860, when it was supposed that a French invasion was imminent.

John Bertram, being a man who moved with the times, neglected none of the methods of cultivation which science has placed at the disposal of the agriculturist. Wherever machinery could be profitably employed it was to be seen on Manor Farm. His eldest son had undergone a thorough training at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, whence he brought home

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many notions, perhaps considered somewhat "new-fangled" by the old gentleman, but usually adopted by him after a short trial. His confidence in his son's knowledge inclined him to place an increasing share of the management in the hands of James, while he himself did a great deal of approving inspection, and enjoyed the well-earned leisure of a well-spent life.

A gentleman to the core, Mr. Bertram had won the respect of his neighbours, both rich and poor, by his sturdy independence, knowledge of his business, and inflexible honour; for John Bertram's word was everywhere known to be as good as his bond.

Mrs. Bertram, a woman of refined and cultivated mind, had died some five years before our story opens, leaving three sons and a daughter, Edith.

James, the eldest son, was practically master of Manor Farm; the second, Alfred, was in London, studying law; and Harold, who had left Rugby about a year, was "kicking his heels" at home.

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"That boy Hal," Mr. Bertram said to James one evening, "won't do much good in England. He's read too many of Fenimore Cooper's and Mayne Reid's books to rest in this quiet old country. I must give him a start in Canada or Australia, or some other colony that he may fancy. Where's the *Field* and the *Agricultural Gazette*, James? Let's have a look at the advertisements." After a few minutes' study of the front pages, he exclaimed, "Here we are—the very thing. 'COLONIAL EXPERIENCE.—A squatter in Queensland is willing to take two or three young gentlemen to learn sheep and cattle farming. First-class run; well watered; good pasture. Fifty square miles of country. Stock, about 20,000 sheep; cattle and horses, 4000. Liberal terms to a capitalist. References to Messrs. Smith, Brown, Robinson, and Co., Wool-brokers, Brisbane. For particulars, address, Donald MacNab, Wallaroo, Maranoa District, Queensland.' What, *fifty square miles*, James! Well, Australia *is* a biggish lump of the world; but here's a man with nearly forty times the acreage of Manor

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Farm. Why, it would be a good slice out of some English counties."

"Yes, father," observed James, "three such 'runs,' as they call sheep farms, would just about cover the county of Rutland; but it isn't *all* good pasture, depend upon that, especially so far out West, where there are vast sandy and stony wastes, and little or no rain for months; then a flood which sweeps everything before it. Many of these runs are a hundred square miles, and you cannot take up less than a block of twenty-five square miles. The rent is only 5*s.* a year for the square mile, to be sure; but what with sandy patches, dense 'scrubs,' and swamps, some blocks of twenty-five square miles will hardly support as much stock as we have on our farm. MacNab doesn't tell us what his run will carry when stocked to its full capacity, and he seems to want some one to put capital into it."

"I think you are a little too critical, James. Anyhow, I shall write to Smith, Brown, Robinson, and Co., and make every inquiry."

"Very well, father, there's no harm in that;

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only it isn't easy to be certain of the truth of what one hears from the other side of the globe, especially when it appears in an advertisement. Good night."

Father and son shook hands, and went to bed, to be up early and drive over to Lord Dalmain's coverts, where they had been invited to join in a great pheasant *battue*.

Nearly a year subsequently to the above conversation a letter arrived bearing the Queensland postmark. Mr. Bertram had written to the firm of wool-brokers, and received satisfactory answers to his questions. They were business agents for Mr. MacNab, whose annual "clip" of wool they forwarded to England. It was of good quality, and had increased much during the past four years. Evidently the squatter was a man of substance. Mr. Bertram's letter, asking on what terms his son would be taken to acquire colonial experience, had had ample time to reach the Maranoa. So it proved, and the answer, enclosed by Smith, Brown, Robinson, and Co., was being read by Mr. Bertram one October evening.

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"Harold," he called out, hearing the clatter of heavy boots on the stone floor of the hall, "is that you?"

"Yes, father."

"Come here, then. I've something that concerns you, from Queensland."

"Oh, all right, father. I will be there directly, when I have rubbed Don" (the setter) "dry, and given him his supper—he's quite done up."

"Read that," said his father, when Harold made his appearance, "if you are still in the mind you were last year about going out to Australia," handing him the letter, which, among other particulars, mentioned that the writer would be in Brisbane the following April, and prepared to take his pupil up country at once.

"If you are satisfied, father, I am," said Harold with decision, after glancing at its contents, and I'm willing to meet the MacNab of Wallaroo in April next."

Harold Bertram was near the end of his twentieth year. In height, he scarcely exceeded five feet eight inches; his compact

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frame, full chest, and square shoulders nevertheless betokened remarkable vigour and power of endurance. His frank and pleasant countenance was set off by a pair of steady grey eyes. At Rugby, his "record" in the athletic sports had been good—particularly in football, rowing, and long-distance running—and he could swim his mile with ease at a creditable pace. Riding to hounds had made him a fairly good horseman; and there were few better shots, either in cover or on the moors, in the county of Yorkshire. His favourite reading had been the works of travellers in new countries, and on his bookshelves were many cherished volumes of natural history and science. He was now about to gratify his desire to see backwoods' life in the Australian bush.

A small sailing-ship, of five hundred tons burden, happened to be the only vessel on the shippers' list which would leave London in time to reach Australia in April. In this a berth was secured, Harold's outfit was provided, and the *Beautiful Star* was destined to be his home for three months.

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The vessel left Gravesend early on the morning of the 14th of January, in tow of a tug, which cast her off at the Nore, and she was soon going down Channel on a spanking north-east breeze. Her passengers consisted of Harold, his cabin mate, Charles Keene, Mr. Jenkins, Mrs. Jenkins, and baby, and Mrs. Grant, a lady going out to join her husband. The remaining occupants of the small saloon were Captain Chatto and his wife, and Bob Low, the chief mate.

On arriving at the Downs the wind had gone round to the W.N.W., and a small fleet of outward-bound vessels lay at anchor. Captain Chatto, however, knowing the sailing qualities of his ship, determined to beat down Channel, and squeeze her out into the Atlantic between the wind and Finisterre. At night, a heavy gale came on, knocking up a short, angry sea, which soon began to tell upon the passengers. Faces became "sicklied o'er," not with the "pale cast of thought," but that greenish-yellow tinge which betokens an impending sacrifice to Neptune. Nothing shakes up the

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stomach like a head sea when a ship is tacking against it. At intervals of an hour or so the captain's steady tramp overhead ceases for a moment, while he gives the word "Ready, about," and instantly everything on deck seems to be in a state of the wildest confusion. For two or three minutes the clatter of hurrying feet, and the banging down of coils of rope goes on; then comes that awful pause when the ship is "in stays," hanging in the wind until she fills on the other tack. A few minutes more shouting and hauling, and presently the ship is again plunging against the head sea. All this is torture to the unhappy sea-sick wight, who feels as though his inside was left up in the air at every pitch of the ship.

Harold, fortunate in not experiencing any painful qualms, was enabled to remain on deck, where, holding on by the mizzen-royal backstay, he endeavoured to find his "sea legs." About midnight, the wind blew almost a hurricane, and an awkward accident occurred. One of the anchors got adrift, and was pitched off the forecastle head, where, hanging by the

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chain cable, it knocked an ugly hole in the bow before it could be hauled in-board and secured.

After the first day or two, Harold and his cabin mate, Keene, a good-humoured young fellow, became quite "chummy." The other passengers, too, as the weather improved and they felt better, made one another's acquaintance.

Captain Chatto, a bluff, hearty seaman, did all in his power to make them comfortable, and everything promised well for a happy voyage. Chess, draughts, and whist passed the evenings away pleasantly.

Harold and Keene began to pick up a little seamanship, to go aloft with the sailors, working with them in helping to set or shorten sail, taking a pull at the braces and halyards, and learning the mystery of "boxing the compass" under the tutorship of Bob Low.

"This is the way it's done," said Bob, taking his pupils to the binnacle. "Now, begin at the north and read the points round to south. North by east; nor'-nor'-east; nor'-east by north; nor'-east; nor'-east by east; east-nor'-east; east by north; east. East by south;

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east-sou'-east; sou'-east by east; sou'-east; sou'-east by south; sou'-sou'-east; south by east; south. When you can read it off like that you will be able to do more than a good many men who call themselves sailors.

"I've heard of the 'lubber's point;' what's that, Mr. Low?" asked Keene.

"The mariner's compass has thirty-two points —*and one more*," replied Bob, with a quiet chuckle. "Look into the binnacle there. Just in front of the steersman, you see a black upright mark. That's exactly in a line with the ship's stem and stern, and right over the keel. Suppose I say to the man at the wheel, 'keep her sou'-sou'-west' (as she is now), the sou'-sou'-west point of the compass will be opposite that black mark—the 'lubber's point.'"

By the 30th of January, the *Beautiful Star* was running past the Canary Islands, and on the 3rd of February, that noble rock, St. Antonio, one of the Cape de Verde Islands, rose slowly out of the Atlantic, the wind gradually dying away as she neared it, and falling dead calm towards evening. Heavy

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clouds hung over the summit of the island, through rifts in which the setting sun shone in bright patches on the earth.

"There's wind in some of those clouds, I'm thinking, Mr. Low," said the captain, as he shut his telescope. "Hadn't you better take in your royals?"

He had scarcely spoken when a squall came off the island and hit the becalmed ship on her starboard quarter. In an instant every sail was clean full with a bang, and the royal masts bending to the strain.

"Square away the yards," sang out the captain, at the same time letting go the mizzen-royal and to'-gallant halyards. "If we don't ease her, something's bound to carry away."

The ship was now tearing through the smooth water, and in half an hour more was running on her course before a steady breeze, with all sail set, towards the equator.

"We picked up the north-east trades nicely after that squall last night," said Captain Chatto at breakfast. "Now, ladies and gentlemen, you can get on your fine-weather toggery, and enjoy

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yourselves on deck. We shan't touch a sail or take a pull on the braces for days together, very likely."

The captain's prediction proved correct. The ship, with her studding-sails set, and crowded with canvas from deck to truck, lying over to the wind at an angle which never varied perceptibly from day to day, slipped through the water at eight knots an hour, reminding all of Byron's lines—

> "She walks the waters like a thing of life,
> And seems to dare the elements to strife."

The ladies brought their work on deck. Harold read aloud and recited; and even Mr. Jenkins felt himself tolerably secure, now that it was quite certain that his bones were not destined to rest in "Davy Jones's locker"—at present, at least. Mr. Jenkins had caused great amusement by his desperate attempts to keep himself on his legs and his hat on his head. When the ship was rolling, he would come up the companion hatch once a day, for a few minutes, to get a blow, and stand with his feet on the third step, clutching the sides of the

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hatch with all his strength. On account of this habit Keene dubbed him "Mr. Jack in the Box." Never was there such a timid man, and he naturally became the "butt" of the whole saloon. Nevertheless, he was a good-hearted fellow, and often joined in the laugh against himself. The baby Jenkins had been an unmitigated nuisance from the first, particularly to Keene and Harold, for the Jenkins family inhabited the adjoining cabin. One morning, Mr. J—— brought up the baby's cradle and deposited it carefully on the poop, with a pillow on each side to prevent it from rolling, while he went below to bring up the baby. The spirit of mischief straightway entered into Keene. He made the cradle fast to the signal halyards, ran it up to the gaff, then went up the mizzen shrouds and tied the ends to the cross-jack-* yard. Mr. Jenkins, coming on deck a few minutes later, and missing his cradle, hurried up to the steersman, and asked him whether it had been blown overboard. *There* was the cradle swinging gaily aloft over the man's head,

* Pronounced "crojjick."

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who could hardly keep his countenance as he answered gruffly, "Mustn't speak to the passengers." Mr. Jenkins was in despair. Captain Chatto turned his back, pretending not to see, his great shoulders heaving with laughter all the time. Bob Low took a look at the sun through his sextant.

"There's your cradle, Mr. Jenkins," said Harold, pointing to the gaff, "hoisted up as a signal of distress."

"Oh, pray get it down, Mr. Bertram, it will blow overboard, and then *whatever* shall we do?"

Despair renders even the timid bold. Mr. Jenkins took the baby down into the cabin, returned on deck, and, with a white face and trembling hands, set himself to climb the mizzen shrouds.

"Hold hard, Mr. Jenkins," called out Keene from the cross-jack-yard; "if you try to come aloft it will be a case of 'man overboard' in no time. I'll haul down the signal of distress."

Mr. Jenkins walked off triumphantly with his cradle, and never again left it to the tender mercies of the frolicksome Keene.

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Incidents like these, trivial as they are, help to enliven the rather monotonous life on board ship. Not that either Harold or his cabin mate found it tedious. From the time of washing down decks till the hour for turning in—all lights out at nine o'clock—they were either busy aloft, or studying the chart in Bob Low's cabin, or enjoying the varied sights to be seen on a first voyage by those who keep their eyes open.

A ship that is without a pet of some kind is badly off indeed. A dog is best, of course, on shore or afloat. A pig is next best—at sea. Now, a half-grown black-and-white porker had been shipped at Gravesend, with a view to being turned into nice brown crackling when he got fat enough. In the trades, "Choog" was let out of his box to roam about where he pleased, except on the poop, and a wonderful pet he became. He got his sea legs sooner than the passengers. When the ship rolled to le'ward, Choog brought himself up, his legs well apart, like any "old salt," in spite of his horny hoofs and a slippery deck, and quietly walked on as

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soon as she settled down on an even keel. The intelligence and humour of piggy come out only on board ship—never ashore, in a sty. Choog was as tame as a cat. If you wanted to make friends with him, you had only to show him a lump of coal, and he would follow you all over the ship. Barley meal and the contents of the cook's wash-tub formed his ordinary fare; but he was not above regaling himself on his own species, in the shape of a piece of salt pork, whenever he could get it. Coal, however, was his "particular weakness." The cook, knowing this very well, kept a sharp eye on master Choog, who lurked behind the mainmast or loafed about the galley door, one might almost say with his hands in his pockets, as if he was thinking of nothing whatever. But those small twinkling eyes were always on the watch. The moment the cook left his galley to draw a bucket of water over the ship's side, Choog was into the coal-box and out again with a mouthful, and scampering away along the deck, crunching and grunting with immense satisfaction.

Nobody ever talked now of anticipations of

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roast pork, or, if they did, it was with bated breath. Choog had taken his place as the pet of the ship.

"To kill and eat such a pig as that would be next door to murder and cannibalism!" said Bob Low. "Anyhow, not a bit of him shall go inside *me*."

As the *Beautiful Star* sped on her way to the equator, over glorious sunlit seas of the brightest blue, many shoals of flying-fish leaped from the water, doubtless in dread of the whale-like monster which had suddenly dashed amongst them. Leaning over the taffrail, it was a constant pleasure to Harold and Keene to watch these flashes of silver and purple spring into the air from the crest of a wave and float away down wind for fifty or a hundred yards on their delicate, gauze-like, pectoral fins. Sometimes hundreds would be in the air at once, all flying in the same direction—almost exactly before the wind.

"Do you think they flap their wings at all, like a bird, Harold?" inquired Keene.

"There have been many discussions on that,"

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Harold replied. "I have been watching them a long time through my binocular, and can see nothing more than an occasional irregular movement, which looks like an effort to keep their balance only. Besides, I don't understand how their feeble muscles could give any considerable impetus to the fins. The real propelling work in the water is done by the tail of a fish, not by its pectoral fins. When these fins have so little power in the water, I can't imagine how they can produce any effect in the air comparable to the wings of a bird, whose muscles are fifty times as powerful as those of a man's arms in proportion to weight. But let us get out on the jib-boom, where we shall see them better."

Seated on this point of vantage, they saw several of the fish come up from right under the dolphin-striker, and sail away ahead on the wind and to leeward of the ship. Some slid down gracefully into the water; others seemed to turn over and fall in quite helplessly; while none rose above the surface more than a few feet. Every now and then one would en-

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counter the crest of a wave, which he was powerless to surmount, and be knocked over.

"For my part," remarked Keene, "I can make out no movement at all like the stroke of a bird's wing, and I have kept my eye on several from the time they rose to the time they fell. They seem to sail along with the wind, and drop when the impulse of their spring out of the water is spent."

"Neither can I perceive any wing, or rather fin-beats," added Harold, "though the shimmer of the sun on them might make one fancy it now and then."

Soon after the binnacle lamp was lighted that evening, something hit the steersman a sharp blow on the arm. It turned out to be a flying-fish, which lay stunned on the deck. Another was picked up near the companion hatch, with its head completely smashed by the force with which it had struck the woodwork. These were immediately taken down to be examined by the saloon lamp, greatly to the delight of the ladies. What lovely creatures they were, with their large dark eyes, brilliant

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sheen of silver, green, and purple, and fins nearly the length of their bodies, the membrane as fine as muslin!

"Why, how like herrings they are!" exclaimed Mrs. Grant, "and just about the same size."

"Yes, but they are really related to the gurnard family, whose pectoral fin-rays are curiously developed like fingers, so that they crawl about on the bottom of the sea or an aquarium tank," observed Harold.

"How do these fish manage to get on to the poop?" asked Keene. "We saw them rise only just over the tops of the waves, and our deck must be ten feet above water. What do *you* say, captain?"

"Well, I don't see any difficulty in that. When the ship rolls, her bulwarks are often much below the level of some wave near at hand, and if at that moment a flying-fish shoots out of the water, attracted by the binnacle light, it must come straight aboard. In fact, one day last voyage one came out of a wave that way, as the ship heeled over to le'ward,

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and hit the main shrouds a good way above the bulwarks, and fell in-board. I believe that they get downright flurried when a ship comes along, and can't tell what they're doing. We shall see plenty more the other side of the line; and, by-the-by, if this wind holds, we ought to be crossing it the day after to-morrow."

"Oh, dear me," cried Keene, with a wink, "I hope we shan't have much of a bump."

Mr. Jenkins looked up with some alarm, and put his usual question, "Is there really any danger, captain?"

"Not quite so much as if my ship ran her nose on a rock hereabouts; but we always go easily over the line. There's very little wind generally. I *have* floated across it stern for'-most in a dead calm, and didn't know it until I took the sun next morning."

"What's taking the sun, captain?" inquired Mrs. Grant.

"Finding the latitude, ma'am. We're now in latitude 1° 40′ north, longitude 25° 15′ west."

The next morning, the *Beautiful Star* was in company with a number of becalmed vessels—

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some hull down on the port beam, some ahead, some astern. The wind had now fallen very light. Between fifteen or twenty vessels could be seen all day, but none within easy signalling distance.

"How is it, Low," asked Harold, "that all these ships are together here? We have sighted only two since we cleared the Channel."

"Why, you see," replied the first mate, "the ocean is big enough; but there are regular tracks, like roads ashore, that all the ships run on, because, there they get the winds pretty regular. All those fellows, I fancy, are bound south'ard, and have been running down their west longitude on the trades, to cross the line somewhere between the twenty-fifth and thirtieth meridians, get through the variables, and pick up the south-east trades as soon as they can find them—just as we are doing. So the sea is not so big after all, because we're all crowding along the same roads. We might sight a hundred vessels in the next week, if the wind holds light or chops about much."

Heavy clouds now began to gather, and the

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royals and top-gallant sails were stowed in anticipation of one of those sudden squalls that lay a ship on her beam-ends without warning, if she carries much canvas. The barometer, too, was falling, and the heat intense. Soon after midday the captain called Harold and Keene on deck to see a waterspout. A mile or so to leeward rose a massive dark pillar, greatly expanded at its base on the sea, and similarly at its junction with the clouds above—a grand, but ominous sight.

"Is there any danger, captain?" asked Keene, with a satirical laugh.

"Danger! I should think there was. If that waterspout came this way and crossed us, it would crumple our ship up like a paper bag."

"Oh, won't that be comforting to Jenkins. I'll tell him," said Keene, shouting through the open skylight into the saloon, "Mr. Jenkins, Mr. Jenkins. Here's such a pretty thing; a huge black tower of water coming along the sea to swamp the ship, captain says. Hurry up, it's the last sight you'll ever see!"

Mr. Jenkins did not reply to this kindly

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invitation. Meanwhile, the splendid column of water remained almost stationary in the calm, sultry air.

"Stand by royal and t'gallant halyards, Mr. Low," sang out the captain. And, a few minutes afterwards, "It looks very heavy; let go royal halyards, and clew up. These savage little whirlwinds are all round us now. See how the water is seething there"—pointing to the weather quarter, where a moment later up sprang a second waterspout, with a flash of lightning darting from the cloud above.

Within less than half an hour from its appearance, the first waterspout broke up, the second having disappeared in about ten minutes. The sky cleared, and the ship moved slowly southwards before an easy breeze.

"What is the cause of a waterspout, captain?" asked Harold.

"That's easy to ask, but hard to answer," replied the skipper, now lighting his pipe, the look of anxiety having passed from his face. "There are many explanations. As far as I can judge the whirlwind seems to come from

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aloft, bringing with it a mass of condensed vapour, and, when it reaches the sea, tears up the water, carries it round with a spiral motion, and whirls it up into the air. I'm quite certain sea water goes up, for I've known rain come down and run over my mouth as salt as old junk. Now, that water must have been carried up in the same way as you see the leaves and dust on land. I'd rather have to weather out a gale any day than float about on a smooth sea among these waterspouts."

During the past few days the pole star had been getting very low down in the north, and on the evening of the 12th of February the Southern Cross could be just seen rising above the southern horizon. Venus shone out magnificently in the east, and in spite of the heat—ninety degrees in the saloon—it was a glorious night.

"You call *that* the Southern Cross, eh?" exclaimed Keene. "Then every picture I have ever seen of it in books is a fraud."

"If you believe all you read or see in books, Mr. Keene, you'll have to swallow a mighty

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deal of rubbish, especially when it has anything to do with the sea," observed Captain Chatto, sententiously.

"So that's *the* constellation of the southern hemisphere that there's so much fuss about! I shouldn't have thought it; it's like an elongated ace of diamonds with a star at each corner, and three or four scattered about inside," continued Keene. "I should never have noticed anything remarkable about it if it hadn't been pointed out to me. It isn't a patch on our dear old 'Great Bear' in the way of constellations, which we shan't see now for many a year, I suppose."

The Southern Cross was voted by all a sad disappointment. The general aspect of the heavens, too, seemed not nearly so fine as that of the northern hemisphere. But the moonlight in the tropics! What words can describe it?

Harold and Keene frequently slept on the poop, with its light shining full on their faces, in defiance of the time-honoured fiction about the certainty of being struck with "moon-blindness." On these serene nights, the ship lay

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almost motionless, casting her shadow far out on the ocean—a long, triangular, dark patch on the silvery water. Not a sound broke the stillness but the creaking of the rudder or the occasional rattle of a block as the sails lifted for a moment and sank back against the mast. The steersman leaned on the wheel more asleep than awake; and there was no sign besides of the existence of that little world of human beings rocked in their solitary cradle on the mighty deep.

Next day, the *Beautiful Star* drifted across the line in a dead calm, and the usual farce of "Neptune coming on board" was played, Harold and Keene joining in all the boisterous merriment which attends this welcome interval in the sailor's monotonous life.

For some time past the fresh water had been running short, owing to the leakage of unsound casks (put on board after dark at Gravesend), and the captain now gave the unwelcome intelligence that the allowance must be reduced to a quart daily for each person, without distinction, for all purposes, including that required by the

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cook. About a pint only was thus left for drinking, tea and coffee being out of the question. The intense heat rendered this state of things most distressing. Every one suffered from perpetual thirst. Harold, however, knowing the absorbent power of the skin, sat with his bare feet in a bucket of salt water for an hour in the day and an hour in the evening. This not only proved cooling and refreshing, but entirely allayed the sensation of thirst. The captain and others, at first rather inclined to laugh at him, tried it, and found the greatest relief from this method of drinking through the skin; the ladies, too, having their turn at it in a secluded corner of the poop. The precious pint of fresh water was sipped at long intervals, but sufficient passed through the skin into the blood from the salt-water foot-bath to compensate for the excessive perspiration, with the thermometer at 95° under the awning. But for this, the distress must have been most severe. The sailors, during their "watch below," also took turns at a long soak in a cask set on end and filled with salt water.

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Day after day the broiling heat continued; the pitch oozed out from the planks of the deck, while the sails hung flat against the masts. The *Beautiful Star* lay

> "As idle as a painted ship
> Upon a painted ocean."

The helmsman lolled lazily over the wheel, for the vessel was without any steerage-way in the dead calm, surrounded by hundreds of "Portuguese men of war"—those delicate creatures which rise from the abyss and spread their gauzy blue and purple sails on the surface in the tropical sun.

On these hot, calm nights—so windless that an ordinary match would burn to the end without flickering—the rats, tortured by thirst, came from below and swarmed on the bulwarks and about the rigging, eagerly licking the dew which fell copiously upon everything. So intent were they on quenching their thirst, that they would let any one approach almost within arm's-length.

Harold and Keene, thinking this a good opportunity for ridding the ship of some of

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these pests, made strenuous efforts to kill them or knock them overboard from the bulwarks with a swab. But the cunning and activity of the animals proved more than a match for them. The rats would dart up the shrouds and backstays with cat-like agility, and get aloft quicker than the smartest jack tar. One, when hard pressed, ran up a slack rope and got out of reach before Keene could knock him down. Harold then caught hold of the rope and jerked it violently, with the object of shaking the beast overboard, but the rat clung fast to his hold, and nothing moved him.

The carpenter coming up at the moment, Keene said, "Chips, look at that rat, we can't shake him off. How does he hold on?"

"Hold on?" repeated Chips, turning his quid deliberately in his mouth, "why, *he sticks his teeth into the rope* when you shake it, and then he's reg'lar *nailed* on to it. You may try all you like, there he'll hang till you're tired on't. Let the rope alone a bit. See, there, up he goes." Finding the rope no longer moved, the rat ran on and was soon safe on the mainyard.

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"Chips" had made himself a great favourite on board by his good humour. He was also an unusually intelligent and observant fellow. Next morning, while tightening the hoops on a water cask, he pointed out to Harold a small hole, scarcely larger than would admit a pin, in one of the staves. The wood had been gnawed away all round for the space of two or three inches, becoming extremely thin at the bottom of the depression, whence the water had oozed out slowly.

"That's rats," he said, "they've had a good share of our water. See that, now, the cunnin' beggars. But I've known 'em rasp the wood so thin they could suck the water through without making a leak. When I was aboard the *Cornwall*, from Sydney to London, in 1840, the cap'n told me to put some fresh water every night about the main deck in flat square tins when it was hot, dry weather, and then the rats let our casks alone. They get plenty to drink when it rains."

The serious anxiety on account of the fast decreasing supply of water was relieved a few

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days after crossing the line by the promise of abundant rain. A sail was rigged up on the poop, and every preparation made to catch the precious supply. When it did come—after a sultry morning, and immediately following a crash of thunder from the low black clouds—the sky seemed to pour forth streams of water, which flowed over the decks an inch deep. A bucket standing on deck was full in a few minutes. The flood rushed over the break of the poop on to the main deck like a miniature waterfall, and could hardly get away through the scuppers. All hands turned out, and worked with a will, catching the water in buckets as it ran out of the sail, and filling up the casks; for it might not last ten minutes. Before dark the sky cleared and the wind freshened; but there was now no further apprehension of that most terrible of all sufferings at sea—want of water—though it did taste slightly brackish, with a distinct flavouring of hemp and pitch.

The *Beautiful Star* made a splendid fast run to the southward and eastward until, in Lat. S.

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41° 18′, Long. E. 30° 11′, she encountered a terrific gale from the south, and lay-to for twelve hours under close-reefed mizzen topsail and trysail. When the gale had blown itself out it was found that the rudder had split for a length of three or four feet. On discovering this, the captain ordered a spare spar, with running tackle at each end, to be lashed over the stern, ready at a moment's notice, should the rudder carry away, as he feared. This contrivance, lowered over the stern into the water, would have helped to keep the ship steady, and by hauling, first on one end and then on the other, something like steering could have been managed, though only before the wind, and the ship could have been prevented from broaching to. For several days the captain tried to bear up for the Cape to repair; but it was ticklish work for the damaged rudder, beating against head winds and heavy seas. On a tolerably fine day, Bob Low and the second mate were let over the stern at considerable risk, and succeeded in getting several turns of a chain round the

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rudder, and made fast. This was fortunate. On the same night it came on to blow heavily from the west. The chance was not to be thrown away, so the good ship was put before the wind, and went rolling on her course through mountainous seas at thirteen knots an hour.

The first sight of albatrosses in this region greatly delighted Harold and his friend. They had heard much of these magnificent "storm gulls," whose lives are passed in ranging the ocean night and day on unwearied wing; often two thousand miles from the nearest land; never visiting the shore, except to rear their single chick on the rocky islets of the northern hemisphere during the months of May and June, and in the southern during those of November and December. These scavengers of the ocean can only be considered happy when they chance to light on a dead whale, or occasionally take a dainty morsel out of a shoal of flying-fish. Always ravenously hungry they seem. One day they may float on the calm water gorged with food, the next a gale

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springs up, and they can neither settle on the raging billows nor satisfy their hunger, perhaps for days in succession. Miserable as it is, they will follow a ship day after day for a chance of the scraps thrown overboard in the cook's waste bucket. Round and round the vessel the albatrosses sailed with majestic ease and grace, sweeping right ahead, and returning on a great circle to the stern, notwithstanding the speed at which she was going. All thought of then catching any was out of the question.

"How long do you think that big fellow has sailed on and off the wind without flapping his wings?" asked Keene of Bob Low.

"Can't say; maybe three or four minutes."

"But I've heard of them keeping it up for an hour or so," in a tone of disappointment.

"A landsman's yarn that," said Bob, laughing.

"Well, take out your watch, Keene, and time him, while I keep him under observation through the binocular. Now—he's flapping his wings for a fresh start," said Harold.

Rising from near the surface with a dozen

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vigorous strokes of its long wings, the noble bird ascended on a slight curve until it reached the height of the mizzen-royal yard, and then, extending its wings rigidly, sailed round the stern in ever-widening circles, ending in a straight course, which carried it far away ahead of the ship, when it gradually approached the water, and, turning its feathered sails to the wind with a few powerful strokes, again rose, changing its direction, and came soaring back majestically close under the stern, having made the complete circuit of the vessel.

"How long, Keene?"

"Nearly two minutes and a half between his first start and the turn back, without flapping his wings," replied the timekeeper.

"And I never saw the least movement of his wings from the shoulder until he turned on the other tack," rejoined Harold.

Hour after hour they watched, and timed the flight, and observed the graceful aërial gymnastics of these children of the storm. Some dozen or so were sailing in every direction on the fresh breeze; now going almost dead to

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windward for a short distance, then swooping down wind with a velocity that made the pace of the ship—ten knots an hour—appear ridiculously slow.

"The wind's rather too far aft, and there's too much of it for them to do their best," remarked Bob Low. "Give 'em a six or seven knot breeze, right abeam, and they'll keep sailing a good three or four minutes without a stroke o' the wing. You'll see by-and-by, very likely."

The wind again became very strong from the south-west, and the albatrosses parted company with the ship. Within a few days' sail of the coast of Tasmania, however, they again gathered round her in numbers—the young bred in the previous November and December accompanying the older birds.

On a glorious day, with a calm sea, the ship going three or four knots an hour, Bob Low set to work to teach Harold and Keene how to catch an albatross. Whipping a strong hook on to the end of some thirty fathoms of old log line, and fixing a few corks to keep the end on the surface, he coiled the line on deck, and prepared

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for action. "Now let's have some 'ground-bait,'" he said, emptying a bucket of slush and scraps over the stern. In a few moments, a cloud of birds wheeled round in their flight, settled on the prize, and were busily engaged in gobbling it up—fighting for every morsel. Then, putting a nice piece of fat pork, the size of a walnut, on his hook, Bob lowered it gently over the stern, paid out his line slowly and waited. As it drifted fifty or sixty yards astern, two sharp-eyed albatrosses dashed down and fought for the bait. A sharp jerk, a steady pull, and "Haul away now, boys, he's fast," from Bob, threw the whole of the passengers into a state of excitement. The bird struggled violently, setting his great webbed feet out against the water, and spreading his wings to resist the two men, Bob and Harold, who were tugging away to bring him up to the stern. After a few minutes' gallant fight for liberty, the bird's strength failed; he was fairly hauled under water, in spite of the resistance of his immense wings, and drawn over the taffrail on to the poop.

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"Hurrah!" shouted Keene, rushing at him to pinion his wings.

"Look out, he'll shear your fingers off with that bill of his! Let him bide, he can't fly," cried Bob. The splendid snow-white bird flopped helplessly on the deck, staring round with a bewildered look, but totally unable to rise on account of the long wings and short legs. In a few moments, he stretched out his neck and vomited the contents of his stomach—about half a pint of thick, oily liquid. The hook, which only hung lightly in the upper mandible, fell from his beak.

"He's not hurt much," exclaimed the ladies. "Don't kill him, please."

Visions of trophies passed through Harold's mind—the skull, wing-bones, and feet—for his natural history collection; but the appeal of the ladies was irresistible. Harold and Keene stretched his wings to the utmost, while Bob measured their spread.

"Ten feet, good, from tip to tip," he reported; "and that's nearly as big as they make 'em in any part of the world."

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"Now, do let him go," begged Mrs. Grant.

Accordingly, Harold took one wing and Keene the other, carefully avoiding the formidable beak, and launched the great bird over the ship's side. Feeling himself free, his wings were spread instantly, and, without touching the water, he soared round and joined his companions in their flight, unharmed by his strange experiences on board the *Beautiful Star*.

All day the albatrosses hovered around the ship, picking up the potato peelings and other refuse cast overboard by the cook. On rising from the smooth water they went a long distance, beating the air with their wings, and as soon as they cleared the surface turned in a curve and described a wide ascending spiral. In the evening they dropped down upon the water one after the other to roost, and could be seen through the telescope sitting on the calm sea preening their feathers, until they faded away on the horizon. Next morning at daylight they came up one by one from astern, slowly winging their way to the ship. Several of those which had been in company the day before

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could easily be recognized, especially one curiously pied, brown-headed bird, which had lost one of its flight-feathers, showing a clearly-defined gap in the wing when it came between the light and the eye.

There can be no doubt that the albatross is capable of extraordinary endurance on the wing. The wind freshened, and the ship ran an average, by the log, of nearly eight knots an hour for three days and two nights; yet this conspicuous bird followed day and night unweariedly the whole time, the gap in his wing being seen as easily by the light of the moon as by day.

Again the wind fell to a light air, and the heat was intense. A miserable horse, which had been ill the whole voyage, died, and was hove overboard, the gases already generated by decomposition, causing the body to float. The few albatrosses following immediately settled down upon it; but in half an hour's time a vast cloud of birds had gathered round the welcome and unexpected prize, which was still in sight three or four miles astern, the wind being too light to carry the ship away from it.

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What a scene could be witnessed through the telescope! What struggling and fighting among the surging mass of beautiful creatures contending for a share of the disgusting banquet!

"How do they find out that there is a feed for them?" asked Keene.

"Much in the same way as the vultures, I should think," said Harold. "Do you recollect the lines in Longfellow's 'Hiawatha?'

> 'Never stoops the soaring vulture
> On his quarry in the desert,
> On the sick or wounded bison;
> But another vulture, watching
> From his high aërial look-out,
> Sees the downward plunge, and follows;
> And a third pursues the second,
> Coming from the invisible ether,
> First a speck, and then a vulture,
> Till the air is dark with pinions.'"

"That's just about it," remarked Bob. "One albatross sees another going straight away for something, and follows him; then others on the horizon all round go in the same direction. When they're up in the air they must be able to see the white feathers against the dark water for a great distance. Anyhow, if something

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they can eat is hove overboard, there's soon plenty of 'em round it, though you mayn't have seen half a dozen about before."

"We are now, according to reckoning, about one hundred and twenty miles to the west and south of Van Diemen's Land, and ought to sight it to-morrow afternoon, if we get enough wind," Captain Chatto announced that evening at dinner.

Such a glorious night it turned out! The Southern Cross now shone far above the horizon. The air just lifted the sails and let them flap lazily against the masts.

Looking over the ship's quarter, a thin line of bright blue light could be seen streaking her sides and broadening out in a stream of dancing stars far away in her wake. Every tiny wavelet, as it broke against the ship or over the dark surface of the sea, shot forth a thousand luminous flashes—gems of phosphorescent light more beautiful than all the diamonds of Golconda. Towards midnight the ocean became covered with a luminous haze, which suffused with a pale blue glow the faces of those who

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stood on the poop watching this marvellous and superb natural display. Bob Low threw a bucket over the side with a line, and it struck out a blaze of light from the surface. Then he hauled it on to the deck for examination, the passengers gathering eagerly round. But the water in the bucket was dark. On stirring it rapidly with the hand, however, a few faint sparks were emitted. It was hardly possible to believe this to be part of the water gleaming all round the ship, so soon did the light fade from it.

"And all this glorious illumination is caused by an infinite multitude of marine animalcules," observed Harold. "Once at Brighton, on a calm, hot night, I saw the pebbles touched with phosphorescence as the waves lapped the shore, and a few patches flecked the water here and there; but I could never have imagined myself floating like this on an undulating sheet of light in the ocean—with the ship the only dark spot in this fairy land!"

To turn in on such a night to a narrow bunk in a stuffy cabin could not be thought of.

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Harold and Keene therefore rolled themselves in their rugs on deck, and slept soundly, breathing the pure balmy air. About two hours before dawn the captain roused them with, "Hullo, there; up you get, lads, if you want the first sight of land!"

"Where? where?" exclaimed Keene, starting up and rubbing his eyes.

"There away—on the weather bow. Mr. Low," (calling out to the first mate, who came on deck to take the watch), "heave the lead."

"Heave the lead, there," shouted the mate.

The watch came aft, took the lead out of the tub in which the deep-sea line was ready coiled, and passed it forward outside the rigging on to the forecastle head. The bight of the line was then rove through a snatch-block fast to the mizzen rigging.

The man forward cried, "Watch, sir, watch," and hove the lead overboard, while another in the main chains let go the slack immediately afterwards.

"Fifty fathoms by the line, sir, and no bottom," reported Bob.

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"That will do, Mr. Low," said the captain, turning to go below. "Keep her the course—nor'-east and by north—for two hours, and then call me."

"But, where's the land, after all, Bob?" asked Harold. "The captain called us up to see it. I can't make out anything, and my sight's as good as his."

"He hasn't *seen* it either," laughed Bob, "but he's *smelt* it; and if you'd been as long at sea as Captain Chatto and me, your nose would be as sharp for a whiff o' the land. It's down there on the weather beam, bearing east-sou'-east, and the wind's off it now. Don't you smell it? Take a good sniff to wind'ard."

No; they could make out nothing unusual for some time.

"Blow the salt air out of your nose, and have another good pull at it," said Bob.

Gradually they began to perceive a peculiar faint scent, unlike anything they had experienced before, and within the next half-hour were inhaling that never-to-be-forgotten odour, so unmistakable and so agreeable to those who have been long at sea—the smell of the land.

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As the sun's coming light tinted the eastern sky with roseate dawn, a long, low, irregular dark line stood out against the horizon, at first dimly, but presently sharply cut on the background of glowing light. What a scene for a painter's brush—could he catch the ever-varying tints of violet, orange, and red before they melted away in a golden flood as the sun flashed its first level rays over the land straight into the faces of those who stood gazing, silent and enchanted, from the deck of the ship!

"Hurrah for Tasmania!" shouted Keene, no longer able to restrain his feelings, and almost throwing his cap overboard; while Harold was busy making a sketch of the outline of the first land on which his eyes had rested in the southern hemisphere. "How far is it, Low?" he asked.

"Fifteen miles, about, I should say," replied the mate.

As the ship was now heading for Bass's Straits, she rapidly neared the land, and before noon was running along it five miles from the

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shore. And a lovely sight indeed was this beautiful island lying in the southern ocean, encircled by an emerald sea, flecked with patches of pearly foam, the wavelets leaping before the gentle breeze in the glowing sunshine. Fine, bold cliffs rose from the beach, behind them a well-wooded table land; and in the distance a range of high, rounded hills. Here and there, as could be seen through the telescope, were undulating downs and park-like scenery, with noble trees distributed about, reminding the beholder of an English landscape.

Next morning, land appeared in every direction, with outlying rocky islets, the nurseries of the albatross, of which hundreds were skimming the surface, but too intent on the shoals of fish to pay any attention to the ship. On the following day it fell dead calm. Albatrosses dotted the smooth surface everywhere, washing themselves, and sitting on the water with their great white wings spread out to dry. Numbers of small birds came off the land and perched on the rigging. These little fellows were attired in suits of red, blue,

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and yellow, the colours put on apparently haphazard, their comical faces spotted like that of the clown in a pantomime. Man was evidently an "animal" unknown to them, for they flitted about the rigging chirping merrily, and only just evaded the hand stretched out to take them. Alongside, in the clear green water, floated scores of jelly-fish, as large as an ordinary parasol and of delicate pink colour, which slipped in the most provoking way out of the bucket dipped over the side to catch them. Three seals, wondering doubtless what monster had invaded their domain, came and gambolled round the ship, exhibiting a grand series of aquatic gymnastics, and occasionally pausing to snort defiance from their nostrils.

The welcome breeze sprang up in the afternoon, and the ship was soon racing though the straits. Cape Howe, the first point on the Australian shore, loomed up on the port bow late one evening, and two days afterwards the *Beautiful Star* lay to off Sydney Heads, rolling gunwale under, in a heavy swell, with her signal flying for the pilot.

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"We're off Port Jackson, so the skipper says. I shouldn't have thought it," remarked Keene to Harold, when they were looking eagerly landward for some sign of an entrance.

"No; there seems little chance of getting through that solid line of cliffs. But even Cook passed it in 1770 without going in, believing it only a small boat-harbour, and, curiously enough, the entrance to this magnificent harbour was discovered by an exploring party from inland," said Harold.

The pilot came on board at six in the morning, and headed the ship for the cliffs, with the intention, as it appeared, of running her on to that frowning wall of rock. Nevertheless, she stood on until it could be seen that the cliffs overlapped each other, and the entrance gradually opened to view. Then, squaring away the yards, the pilot ran her through the narrow passage between "the heads," standing scarcely two miles apart, into one of the grandest land-locked harbours in the world, and the *Beautiful Star* was safe in Port Jackson.

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"That's 'Pinch-gut' Fort," said Bob Low, pointing to a small rock crowned by a stone building, right in the fair way, "where they used to keep the rowdiest of the convicts in the old days. I wonder whether old Billy is still about here."

"Billy? Who's he?" asked Keene.

"Billy? Why, he was the best jailer they ever had. The convicts sometimes escaped and swam ashore; but the commandant noticed a big shark hanging about, and ordered him to be fed every day to keep him near by. One evening, a convict jumped in, and Billy had him down in a moment, right before the very eyes of the others. The rest thought they would stay where they were, after that."

It was a glorious morning when the ship dropped anchor off Government House, surrounded by gently slooping wooded hills, dotted over with houses. In the numerous bays which indented the harbour, with its fifty miles of coast line, ships of almost any tonnage could be moored close to the shore. Nature had already prepared miles of natural wharfage,

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needing only a facing of stone to convert the shore into quays, where the navies of all the world could lie in safety.

Early on the following day the passengers and captain went ashore, none more rejoiced than poor Mr. Jenkins, who regarded his experience of the sea as little better than three months' imprisonment with hard labour. He had lost four hats during the voyage; the last, a "chimney pot," donned half an hour before landing in order to make an imposing entrance into Sydney, and was compelled to walk up the principal street in a blue cotton nightcap, lent him by the captain until he could take refuge in a hatter's shop, and once more attire himself in what he considered the only becoming headgear of civilized man.

With cordial good wishes those who had been so pleasantly associated on board the *Beautiful Star* parted company. Harold and Keene, however, who had now become fast friends, taking up their quarters at the same hotel, to start for Brisbane by steamer on the following morning.

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CHAPTER II.

Brisbane—Up the River—Great Flight of Cockatoos—Ipswich—Up Country with MacNab—A Bullock Team—Swimming the River Balonne—Hospitality at a Shepherd's Hut—The Bachelor Squatter—Getting Water out of the Ground—The Maranoa—Wallaroo.

"HAROLD, old fellow," began Keene gloomily, as the *Clarence* was steaming northwards to Moreton Bay, "I don't feel at all like parting from you, now that we have been chums so long. I shall try and persuade my uncle to let me go up country to MacNab's. I'm not bound to stick to a desk in Brisbane, if I don't like the idea of it, and at present that's just what I *don't*."

"Of course," replied Harold, with a warm grasp of his friend's hand, "it would be pleasant to go together; but I doubt whether you are

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quite cut out for a squatter. It's downright hard work, and as rough as—well, as any back-woods life in the world. That smart young Queenslander who was studying with my brother James at Cirencester College used to tell us how he was out in the rain for days together 'tailing' cattle, with scarcely time to get a bite of anything; perished with cold at night, and baked to a cinder in the heat of the day; riding after cattle at break-neck pace through scrubs, and often turning in too done up to eat any supper, which he would have to cook for himself, if he wanted it, and *he* was no chicken."

"'Distance lends enchantment to the view,'" laughed Keene, with an airy wave of the hand. "Just the thing for me—camping out, attacked by bushrangers, speared by the Blacks, lost in the Bush, and all the rest of it. 'Peter Parley's Annual' done into fact—delightful!"

Arrived in Brisbane, Harold went direct to Smith, Brown, Robinson, and Co., who informed him that MacNab was staying at Mason's Hotel, while his companion presented himself

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to the firm of Keene and Co., general merchants, where his uncle gave him a cordial welcome.

Mason's was crowded with squatters in town on business—"loafers" of all sorts, "sharks" ready to put the new arrival up to a "real good thing" in the way of a few thousand old sheep pastured on some bit of barren waste, and others eager to "stand a nobbler" to the "new chum," in the hope of relieving him of some of his cash by one or other of the methods familiar in the colonies.

In answer to Harold's note, intimating his arrival, a person in Bush dress presently walked into the common room, drawling out the inquiry, "Whar's Muster Bartram?" and, as Harold rose to meet him, "How d'ye do, lad? Hope ye're wull," extending a clammy paw.

The first view of the Maranoa squatter was not prepossessing. A red face, with "gooseberry" eyes, looked out from a quantity of coarse, rusty hair and beard. Far below the middle height, the figure, though somewhat bent, was nevertheless strong. The well-fitting

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cords and half wellington boots served in some degree to redeem the slovenly appearance of the short, loose coat, and carelessly tied neckerchief.

MacNab had been knocked about the colonial world pretty severely since he left Glasgow—thirty-five years before—as a 'prentice on board an emigrant ship, and ran away at Sydney; but had at length pushed his way through many vicissitudes to his present position by not being burdened with over-sensitiveness in matters of everyday life.

Keene's uncle called on the following day, and made arrangements with MacNab to take the youth for six months' trial of bush life. The three then started at six on the following morning for Ipswich, some fifty miles by water up the Brisbane, in the old stern-wheel steamer *Settler*. For the first ten miles the banks had been pretty well cleared of timber; a settler's weather-board house could be seen here and there, and groves of bananas waved their broad leaves over the stream. Higher up, rose on each side a wall of dark-green scrub, betokening

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rich alluvial soil, with promise of future agricultural wealth. Near the junction of the Bremer with the Brisbane, a flock of great white cockatoos crossed close above the steamer —the advance guard of a mighty host migrating northwards. As far as the eye could reach in every direction they came, and passed in endless phalanx with such deafening screams that even the noise of the great stern-wheel thumping the water could scarcely be heard. On they came, and away they passed for full half an hour, rending the air with an intolerable din, steadily pursuing their course to warmer regions (though the air was yet hotter than English midsummer)—a cloud of white wings casting its shadow on the earth over many a square mile.

"Brutes," observed a young farmer to Harold, "they'll settle on some maize plantation before night, and cut off every cob in an hour—that lot will. You can't trap 'em, or pisen 'em, or shoot 'em, they're that beastly leary. But the young 'uns makes foine poies—they does."

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Arrived at Ipswich (familiarly know as Limestone), MacNab and his two companions took the train to Dalby and Allora, by the first line ever laid in the colony, thus covering about half the distance to the Maranoa. MacNab smoked in silence, and took frequent "nips" out of a portly whiskey-flask, which he carefully refilled at every station—replying curtly to any questions addressed to him.

The strange scenery greatly interested the two young men, and still more the occasional glimpse of an emu stalking over the plain, or a kangaroo sitting up looking at the "iron horse" as if it did not much concern him—for wild animals soon become accustomed to this thundering pioneer of civilization when experience shows them that it goes on its way without molesting them.

Over the Dividing Range, across the magnificent Darling Downs, with fields of English wheat now ripening to harvest; through interminable gum forests, and again mile after mile across deep alluvial plains, the train sped throughout the day and night to the westward,

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steaming into Allora early in the morning amidst a deluge of rain.

MacNab was not the man to let the grass grow under his feet when his face was turned homewards, and the horses were soon brought out of the hotel paddock. The two small trunks which he grudgingly allowed Harold and Keene to bring with them—contenting himself with a valise containing his blanket—were left in the store at Allora, to be brought on by the next bullock dray going out to Wallaroo. MacNab himself would have travelled from the Gulf of Carpentaria to Melbourne with nothing but his blanket and a tin "billy" slung to his saddle; and now these "new chums" were to be taught that the first consideration of the bushman must be for his horse. Keene would have liked to have got half the contents of his trunk somehow on to the animal, and was rather taken aback when MacNab proceeded to strap a coarse blue blanket for him on the "dees" at the saddle-bow, and, pointing contemptuously to the well-stuffed saddle-bags the young fellow held in his hand, "Not them things, unless you want to

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kill my horse before night, and walk the rest of the way!" Harold's animal was equipped in the same manner by MacNab's practised hands, and the hobbles and tin billies slung to all the saddles. Their "luggage" consisted of a flannel shirt and pair of socks rolled in the blanket (articles of luxury about which the hardy squatter did not trouble *himself*), and Harold stowed away a comb and tooth-brush in his pocket.

By midday the three travellers were on the road for the first stopping-place—a "Bush hotel" forty miles distant. Road? It might be so called by a Bushman! A few miles from the township several dray tracks intersected each other, and went off in various directions, meandering about and crossing again at intervals most bewilderingly; MacNab, riding steadily on a few yards in front, and seeming to take no notice of them or of anything else.

"Do you think he knows the way," asked Keene in an undertone. "I shouldn't care to be lost in the Bush—just yet?"

Harold laughed aloud. "Better ask him.

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Depend upon it, he's all right. It only shows how much we have to learn. I couldn't find my way back a mile on the road we've come through this forest—all the trees exactly alike, and these wheel-marks, here, there, and everywhere."

Keene—a good enough performer on a livery-stable hack along a turnpike road—could not manage at all to get on comfortable terms with his mount. The animal was decidedly "rough," and went along at a shambling sidelong trot, so that he could neither rise in the stirrups nor sit easily in his seat. The consequence was that before half the journey was over the skin on his nether limbs had suffered considerable damage; and he screwed himself all over the saddle to humour first one sore place and then another, wondering whether this was an average specimen of a Bush horse.

The fact was, MacNab had brought down with him two of the easiest horses on his station, knowing that if he was to get over the hundred and fifty miles with a couple of "new chums" in reasonable time they must be made as comfortable as possible.

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Going steadily on at eight miles an hour, now over rocky ridges, now through heavy swamps, and again wading small streams, the horses showed no symptoms of distress. "Ten miles more," called out the squatter, as it was beginning to grow dusk. "Hurry up, my lads!" quickening his pace to a gallop. A light at length glimmered through the trees. MacNab jumped down to remove the rails of the paddock inclosure, and Keene slipped from his saddle with a groan, feeling shaken and bruised all over. Turning their horses into the paddock, they laid their saddles and bridles on the verandah of the long low wooden building dignified by the name of "hotel," and walked into the bar, glad to get out of the dismal rain.

What a hideous scene in the heart of that quiet Australian forest! A score of men in various stages of rowdy drunkenness lounged before the counter or sat on empty casks, shouting ribald songs at the top of their voices, or wrangling amidst a storm of oaths; while the landlord, an evil-looking fellow, poured

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out bumpers of the vile poison with which they were soaking themselves. In a corner lay a native, dead drunk on the proceeds of a week's work at a neighbouring station, his naked black body the target for many a contemptuous kick from the motley crew of roystering drinkers.

MacNab shook hands with the landlord, and, turning to a burly bullock driver, who was flourishing a strip of light green paper, and calling for "nobblers round," remarked, "So, there you are; at it again, I see, Garry, knocking down your cheque. Eh?"

Supper and bed were the next move for the travellers. The beds were broad strips of canvas stretched upon trestles, with a couple of blankets for covering. Their clothes were sent to the kitchen fire to dry, if possible, and Harold and Keene put on their spare flannel shirts—anything but dry—and rolled themselves in the blankets, MacNab coming in later, after a booze with the landlord, and turning in with everything on except his boots and coat.

Keene made a bad night of it. Turn which

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way he would, the rough blanket galled his blistered skin, and only recalled by contrast the charms of a feather-bed. Harold, too, had not escaped altogether scot free from his first ride on an Australian horse.

Up in the morning betimes. One sovereign a piece for supper, bed, and breakfast—not so unreasonable either, as things go! MacNab saddled the horses, looked to the girths, and, seeing Keene too stiff to mount, gave him a leg into the saddle with a grin, and—"He's a spanker, that horse; goes easy as an arm-chair." Not altogether either, as the rider thought, a brutal joke at his expense; for the animal was strong and willing, and even comfortable to those who knew how to ride him.

During the day the squatter became rather more affable, talking of the prospects of sheep-farming, and pointing out various objects of interest. He had met with many "new chums," and despised most of them, with good reason. But in his present companions he noticed a certain self-respect and a determination to make the best of things which looked well. In

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Harold, particularly, he saw a promising stock-rider and generally useful man on a station; and one not at all unlikely—judging from what his agents had told him—to be in a position to dispose of some capital by-and-by.

The track, now very distinct, wound up a rocky ridge, at the foot of which lay scores of large logs, some bleached with age, others quite recently cut. MacNab explained that these had been chained by the dray drivers on to the back of the drays to "skid" them down the sharp incline. Without some such drag, the two-wheeled, heavily laden vehicle would overrun the pole bullocks and carry before it the whole team to destruction.

Near the crest of the ridge a tremendous shouting and cracking of whips could be heard, and presently a team of eight bullocks came in sight rushing down the ridge, the driver running beside them, and a large log dragging behind the dray. As they thundered past at full gallop, the driver steered them by whip and voice—a special vocabulary of oaths designed for the instruction of working bullocks

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—in and out among fallen timber and round corners of rock with marvellous skill and decision, until they came to the bottom of the ridge, where the heavy drag was detached. The necessity for this precaution could be seen a little further on, the incline being so steep that the horses breasted it with difficulty.

"A bad bit that," remarked MacNab, "but it saves ten miles round to the south through swampy ground. Only the smartest men bring their teams over here."

A few miles further on they passed many small creeks without difficulty, but towards evening they approached a stream of considerable size, the river Balonne, which, the squatter told them, they would probably have to swim, the water having risen with the recent rains. Riding for a mile or so along the steep, soft banks, he at length announced that he had found the ford—a place where the dark muddy water broadened out a hundred yards in width.

"Now, there's a deep bit in the middle," he said. "The horses are good swimmers. Catch tight hold of the pommel, and don't pull their

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mouths about, or you'll find yourselves head over heels in no time. Take your feet out of the stirrups, and hold tight with your legs." With these encouraging directions, he rode straight into the water.

The horses were up to their girths in the first dozen yards. Then deeper and deeper, until the squatter suddenly almost disappeared from view, nothing being visible but the head of the horse and the head and shoulders of the man. A moment afterwards Harold and Keene felt themselves up to their arm-pits, and almost floated out of their saddles. Their horses, too, were now swimming, and they experienced for the first time the bewildering sensation of the rolling movement of the animals beneath them, and the whirl of the stream rushing past. Nothing before them but the horses' heads, and all around the muddy water for some moments, when they again touched bottom and mounted the opposite bank. Fortunately the swim was short, otherwise there would have been great risk of these inexperienced hands either pulling their horses over or parting company with

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them. MacNab, seeing his companions safe, dashed off at a fast gallop.

"So this is travelling in the Bush," observed Keene gloomily. "I don't like it much—yet. Nothing, I suppose, when you're used to it."

As the sun went down, MacNab informed his companions that they would not reach the Bush hotel that night, but must either find a shepherd's hut, which he knew of thereabouts, or camp out. Fortunately, the hut was found. The squatter dismounted, opened the door, and walked in, with no more ceremony than "Good evening. Can we stop here?" to the sole occupant, who returned the greeting, and answered that they could. He then saw the hobbles securely buckled on the horses' fore-legs, and let them go to pick up their supper in the Bush.

A cheerful fire blazed on the hearth under the wide wooden chimney. The shepherd took a piece of damper from a shelf, reached down a hunk of mahogany-coloured, boiled salt beef from a nail up the chimney, and presented the homely fare to his guests in a tin dish, with the addition of a rare luxury, a few pickled

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onions. They sat down without delay on the earthen floor before the fire and fell to, MacNab dividing the provisions into shares with the long sheath knife which he carried in his belt—a useful article of the Bushman's equipment, serving the purpose of a fork as well—the possession of which the others just now envied him, having to do the best they could with their pocket knives.

The solitude of a shepherd's life begets a silent habit, scarcely broken even by the occasional presence of visitors, and the owner of this hut was no exception. He did not even inquire whither the travellers were bound; but, after making them a billy of tea, went out for a last look at his sheep, offered to give up his sleeping place of rough planks to MacNab—an offer, of course, declined with thanks—and lay down to sleep.

Everything belonging to the travellers was soaked by their plunge through the creek, so that there was nothing for it but to make up a good fire, take off their boots, and lie before the hearth in their wet clothes. And a very

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uncomfortable night, to say the least of it, they passed, while one side was parboiled by the heat, the other shivered with cold; and thin streaks of chilling wind driving through the crevices in the slab walls of the hut made their teeth chatter all night.

By daylight the shepherd was up, letting his sheep out of the yard. He cut himself a slice of beef—all the damper was gone—wished his guests "good day," and went out. According to bush custom, payment was neither offered nor asked. Keene, nevertheless, insisted on the man accepting his pocket-knife, and the squatter promised to send him a pound of tobacco the next time his dray was going down with wool.

Leaving Keene to boil the water and extract a weak infusion from the old tea leaves in the billy, MacNab and Harold took their bridles and sallied out in search of the horses. It was a raw, misty morning, such as often precedes the Queensland winter, and is usually followed by a hot day. MacNab went first to the water-hole, where the horses would be sure to drink when turned out, found their tracks, and fol-

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lowed them through the grass. He knew that their heads would be pointed homewards, and Harold noticed that the tracks all trended towards the west.

The Bushman's horse has no easy time of it. Ridden hard all day, he must spend the night, or four or five hours of it, filling himself with wet grass, and, standing exposed to the heavy dew, snatch an hour's sleep before the saddle is again on his back. Many lack the courage to lie down in hobbles, on account of the difficulty of getting on their legs after remaining for some time in a cramped position with their fore fetlocks bound together. Sore backs and girth galls are almost inevitable during a long journey, so that the moment of saddling up is dreaded by the poor beasts, which wince and kick as the saddle is thrown on their backs, particularly if it is wet. Yet they travel astonishing distances by stages of twenty miles a day, and are able occasionally, when maize fed for a week beforehand, to endure forced marches, such as MacNab was now making, without knocking up.

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A mile of tramping through wet grass, knee high, showers of spray meanwhile falling on them from the bushes, brought MacNab and Harold to the first horse. The squatter unbuckled the hobbles, put on the bridle, seized the mane lock with his left hand, and vaulted on to the unwilling animal's back. The others stood, asleep, at some little distance. Harold, after several unsuccessful attempts, scrambled on to his mount. They drove the third horse before them to the hut, saddled them, and hung them by the bridles to hooks on the door-posts.

Keene had creditably performed his first experiment in getting "breakfast," ready. Even the thin infusion of the old tea leaves and a slice of the salt junk proved acceptable to appetites sharpened by the fresh morning air; and the more so as MacNab told them they would get nothing else until sundown, when they would reach the house of a small squatter, where "a decent feed" might be had.

The sun rose gloriously over the spurs of the hilly country behind them, and by noon sent his rays fiercely on to their backs, lighting

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up the pale green gum forests with the mellow glow so beautiful on Australian autumn days. The wet blankets on their saddle-bows steamed in the heat, and their damp clothes dried rapidly. The horses sweated. The men took off their coats and rolled them up in the saddle-straps in front of them. Still the sun grew hotter, and MacNab decided on taking an hour's "spell" at the next creek to rest the horses. A densely wooded little stream meandered through the hills among rocky gullies, and, at the crossing-place, spread out fifty or sixty yards wide over flat slabs of sandstone—the water, only a few inches deep and clear as crystal. This was the high-road to the western plains. The banks of the creek—a favourite camping-place for bullock-drays going up and coming down country — were strewn with empty bottles, sardine tins, and various other unsightly objects. Little patches of grey ashes dotted the grass in every direction, and numberless wheel-tracks scored the ground. After a drink, the horses fed about quietly in their hobbles, glad to get rid of the wet saddles.

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MacNab sat over the embers of a fire, left smouldering by some draymen who had camped the night before, trying to coax a damp plug of tobacco into a condition fit to smoke, while his companions wandered up the creek, talking of the new and strange country around them.

"What funny trees some of them are," remarked Keene; "they look like those things in a box of toys—wooden and dry, as though they hadn't a drop of sap in them." And, pulling some leaves off a "peppermint" gum, he put one into his mouth, making a wry face, "Phew! taste that, Harold, it's like sucking a bit of alum; and what a peculiar lollipopy flavour it has."

"Yes; all these trees have more or less of astringent and aromatic properties, I believe," said Harold; "and the flesh of the animals which feed on them tastes strongly of it, I have heard. But they make splendid timber, almost indestructible in either wet or dry ground. See how they burn, too. Once a fire is well started in a log it burns the wood right out, and defies

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any ordinary rain. Wherever a man camps, it seems that he can make a fire with the bark or dead wood of any of these trees."

"Well, Harold, how do you like this sort of life, so far? I wouldn't have believed I should ever have had a ducking like that yesterday afternoon, sleep in my wet clothes, and dry them on my back the next day, and pitch into the stuff that chap fetched out of the chimney, for supper and breakfast, as if I should never get anything more to eat. But this fellow Mac-Nab takes it all as a matter of course. He's as hard as nails. That brute of a horse of his has galled me awfully, and shaken all my joints loose."

The severity of the travelling—forty miles a day—had told upon Harold too, and he was far from relishing the discomfort of the journey; but, from his recollection of the narratives of the explorers, Leichhardt, Kennedy, Burke, and Wills, he knew that this was mere child's play in comparison with the hardships frequently endured by pioneer settlers in this new land. While he was surprised to

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see Keene hold out so well, he had no belief in his taking to the life to which he himself was committed for good or evil.

On returning to the crossing-place, they found MacNab saddling up, and impatient to get on. Sundown brought them to the rough bark house—little better, though larger, than the shepherd's hut—of the bachelor squatter, a man in a very small way, settled by arrangement with the owner on a corner of a large run, and doing some business with the butchers who bought for the town markets. He was a cheery young fellow, and did his best to make the travellers comfortable.

"Your nags have had a good doing, MacNab," he remarked. "I'll get their backs washed, and give them a bit of corn before they go out into the paddock."

The supper, coarse but plentiful, was washed down with abundance of well-sweetened tea, and young Mr. Allen produced, with no little pride, from a large iron pot, some steaming English potatoes, grown by a "cockatoo farmer" on the Darling Downs.

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"I work hard," he said, "and I believe in living well. Sorry the tinned salmon's all gone. I came across a party of drays camping last week, and got a two pound tin of American salmon from one of the men, and sent him down a fat wether on the pack-horse in the evening for payment. We *did* pitch into it. It only wanted vinegar and pepper."

The travellers rolled themselves in their blankets and slept soundly. MacNab roused them early, remarking that this last day of their journey was a long one. The horses jogged over the ground at a good pace, jaded as they were, their sensitive ears constantly pointing forward in anticipation of the rest they knew they would enjoy on their own run. MacNab was in a pretty good humour. His tobacco was now dry, and, furnished with a few matches, he cut up the black "plug," rubbed the pieces between his hands, and smoked to his heart's content.

The country over which the travellers were now passing was of the most diversified description. They plodded through mile after

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mile of sand, heavy with the recent rain, on which nothing but a few straggling tufts of grass like bunches of iron-wire could find sustenance. Presently a narrow strip of fine timber, stretching away to the north and south as far as could be seen, would start up in singular contrast to the surrounding barrenness. Here, again, a ridge of limestone had pushed its way through the sand, and was clothed with little groves of the black wattle and excellent grass. By-and-by they would find themselves in a forest of "she-oaks," with ferns and grass-trees covering the black vegetable mould. Skirting the spurs which ran down from the distant hills in the north, they passed outcrops of bare rock varied by "pockets" of luxuriant vegetation, among which the agile brush-tailed rock kangaroos were springing over the broken surface with astonishing bounds.

There had evidently been much denudation of strata here, exposing now the sterile sandstone and again the fertile limestone, which could be recognized at any distance by its

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covering of vegetation. The few shallow gullies contained no streams, though the ridges of driftwood along their sides pointed clearly to a great rush of water through them during the winter floods.

MacNab cut a long "she-oak" sapling with his belt-knife, and, giving the reins of his horse to Harold, intimated his intention of "getting a drink." Descending into the sandy bed of a gully, he looked about him some minutes, and, stopping close to a large rounded boulder, began to work the stick forcibly down with both hands into the bed of the gully, moving the upper end round in a circle. After some little time he withdrew the primitive boring-rod, leaving a funnel-shaped hole between two and three feet deep. The others dismounted, threw their bridles over their arms, and peeped into the hole. Where was the water? Wait a bit. Very soon the bottom began to grow damp, and presently a small quantity of water could be seen. The horses stretched out their necks eagerly, being by some means aware of the presence of the fluid

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they so much needed. The squatter stood for some time in silence, looking into the hole, then unstrapped the tin drinking-cup from his saddle, remarking, "It's all right." A quarter of an hour or so had elapsed, the water had risen within a foot of the surface, and the men were enabled to dip their tins into the hole and take deep draughts of the purest and clearest water. Now for the thirsty and impatient horses. MacNab carefully enlarged the opening by scraping back the sand, took the bits out of their mouths, and led them one by one to the hole, to refresh themselves with the very scanty supply it afforded. After this the squatter rose considerably in the estimation of his companions—Harold making a mental note of the incident for future use.

Many miles of weary plodding brought them within sight of a river, winding through a plain, whose name MacNab, turning in his saddle, gave with evident satisfaction—the "Maranoa." Straight across the plain to the ford rode the squatter. Here the river ran, broad and shallow, over a pebbly bed, and the

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horses scarcely wetted the saddle girths. But, a month later, it might be a raging torrent, a mile in width, sweeping over the plain, in which the most daring horseman would not risk his life.

The country on the other side of the river consisted of low ridges, wooded with gum forest, stretching many a mile to the westward, and intersected by creeks at frequent intervals, "one of the best bits in Queensland," as MacNab observed. A large flock of sheep, belonging to his next neighbour, was feeding along the edge of the forest, and a choice mob of horses, principally mares with their foals, grazed on the plain. It was trying work for the fagged-out horses of the travellers going over the rocky crests of the ridges; but they struggled gamely on, looking eagerly about them as they doubtless recognized here and there indications of being near "home." Darkness nevertheless had set in before MacNab gave the welcome intelligence that they were now on his run, and within a few miles of the station. A chorus of barking dogs announced the arrivals at the slip panel of

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the paddock; Bill Humphreys—the general overseer—let down the rails with a hearty "good evening," and they dismounted in front of the long, low verandah which surrounded the station-house, following the squatter indoors with their saddles and bridles.

Bill Humphreys took the horses away to the stable to wash their backs, in the course of which operation he passed no very complimentary remarks on the want of care that had been shown in their treatment since he sent them down to Allora "fresh as paint." Saddle sores and deep girth galls bore witness to the truth of his opinion that they would need three months' "spell" in the Bush before they would be again fit for any work.

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CHAPTER III.

The Head Station—Bill Humphreys shows the "New Chums" round—Shepherding the "Crawlers"—A Dose for the Dingoes—Killing and salting a Bullock—An Adventure with an Opossum—The Black Fellow's Grave.

MRS. MACNAB, a portly person, received her visitors affably, and set them down to a supper of salt junk, sweet potatoes, and excellent damper. Bill Humphreys came in later, and gave his report to the squatter of all that had happened since his absence, which appeared to be satisfactory. The new-comers were shown into the "bachelors' room" by the light of about an inch of tallow-candle, home-made, from the fat of sheep which had died a natural death, and immediately turned in on the canvas-covered trestle beds, wrapped in their own blankets — sheets being quite a superfluous

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luxury at Wallaroo and other stations so far out, at least for bachelors.

The young men were up early, anxious to have a look about them, and glad of an opportunity of walking off their stiffness.

The position for the head station had been chosen with much judgment. It stood on a slight elevation, two or three hundred yards from Myall Creek—so called on account of its rise, twenty miles to the north-westward, in a range of hills mostly covered by that kind of scrub—a well-wooded little stream, never dry, and fordable at several places in almost any weather. Some half a mile distance down the creek was a "wash-pool," which might have been expressly designed by nature for cleansing the fleeces of the squatter's sheep preparatory to shearing them, so little had art to do with rendering it perfect for the purpose. Across the creek was a stretch of level ground, bordering the stream for miles, with excellent feed for cattle. The greater part of MacNab's run, however, was on the head station side of the creek, and a bold sweep of the Maranoa came

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within four miles to the eastward. Small tributaries, feeding both Myall Creek and the river, intersected the run in every direction, and chains of lagoons—some of extraordinary depth—marked the former course of the Maranoa, possibly before even the Blacks inhabited the country. These lagoons were covered with multitudes of wild fowl, and ground game of all kinds was abundant in their neighbourhood. To an experienced eye this well-watered and diversified country of plain and forest indicated capabilities of great development—the present stock (barely twenty thousand sheep, and considerably less than four thousand cattle and horses) being only half the number it would have carried.

After breakfast, Harold and his friend strolled round, and, meeting Bill Humphreys, who wished them "Good morning" cheerily, accepted his offer to spend an hour or two with them.

Bill was a good specimen of the Bushman, capable, too, of managing the largest station in Australia, so varied had been his experience

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of twenty years in New South Wales and Queensland; though, having no capital with which to start for himself, he was perforce content with eighty pounds a year in his present billet, until something better should turn up. Though he stood five feet eight only, squarely built, and reached scarcely twelve stone in weight, Harold was nevertheless at once struck with the evidence of extraordinary muscular development exhibited in every part of the man's frame. Hardship and exposure had touched his close crisp hair with grey; yet he had not turned his fortieth year; while his short brown beard set off a face tanned to almost the same colour. A cabbage-tree hat on his head, a short tweed jacket over his flannel shirt, a broad belt round his waist, cord breeches, and neat boots, calf-high, on his slightly bowed legs, and his trusty stock whip looped in his hand, Bill Humphreys was the picture of a horseman who "could go anywhere and do anything." At mustering cattle, cutting out "scrubbers" by moonlight, getting in wild horses, and drafting beasts in the stock-yard,

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there was not a man in the country his master, and few his equals. Bill never did anything for the sake of showing off; but if a more than usually vicious horse was to be taught manners and obedience, he could take the job in hand. If he had a mob of wild cattle before him on the way to the stock-yards, he would stick to them up and down rocky gullies, over dead timber, and through the densest scrubs at break-neck pace, with the keenest enjoyment of the risk and excitement to be crowned by certain success. With all his dash and courage when dealing with horned stock, Bill possessed the rare quality of patience and good management where sheep were concerned. He would dismount and pick up some lamb, abandoned by its mother, in the rear of a flock, and carry it for miles on his saddle-bow, or nurse a sickly ewe through her first lambing—for years of rough pioneer work had not hardened his kindly nature. Strict as an overseer, he would have reasonable work out of the men, and have it well done; but he never worried them with useless tasks, or "bossed them about" to no

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purpose. No skulker could hope to escape his sharp eye; while he was always ready to show an ignorant but willing man how anything ought to be done. MacNab valued him for the knowledge which contributed so much to his pecuniary advantage, rarely disputed his judgment, and even put some check on his own surly disposition with a man who, he knew, would not stand being "roughed."

The buildings were arranged round three sides of a square, and consisted of the dwelling-house, the wool-shed, the store, a long open shed serving as a stable and shelter for carts, one large building, known as the "travellers' hut," capable of accommodating a dozen men, and two smaller huts, one of which was occupied by the cook, the other by the overseer. Between each of these, sufficient space was left to prevent fire from spreading from one to another; all being built of gum-tree slabs and roofed with bark or shingles (pieces of thin flat pine about the size of roofing slates), with the exception of the store and wool-shed, which were covered in with sheets of galvanized iron.

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Facing the open side of the square, at some little distance, were the stock yards, and a pen for the "crawlers"—the halt and the maimed, drafted out from other flocks, and sent here, where they would receive some kind of attention. The whole of these buildings and yards were enclosed within a strongly fenced paddock, a mile long and half a mile broad, in which were kept the saddle horses needed for immediate use, and a few fat bullocks for slaughtering. On the rich alluvial soil across the creek was the "cultivation paddock," of some three or four acres, where maize and sweet potatoes grew as well as could be expected without much care.

Like almost every settlement in the far Australian Bush, the surroundings of Wallaroo presented a remarkably slovenly appearance. In every direction scores of tree stumps stood a couple of feet or so above the ground, where the trunks had long since been felled for fencing, building, or firewood. Further back, among the green foliage of living gums, stood many a dead giant of the forest, white and withered to

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their topmost twigs—once noble trees, slain by peeling the bark from them for roofing. These, in their turn, would fall to axe and saw, and be converted into posts and rails or firewood. Outside the stock-yard lay dozens of heads and feet of bullocks, some of the skulls cleaned white as ivory by the ants, others in various stages of decay, emitting a peculiar musty odour, and a few from which the crows had not yet finished picking the tit-bits. Within a radius of half a mile from every station in the Australian Bush may be seen these and similar traces of the defacing hand of man.

Taking down the heavy outside shutter from the window of the store, and turning the key, Bill said, "Walk in, and have a look round." Sacks of flour, bags of sugar, chests of tea, and drums of tobacco were piled against one side, at the back of the counter. Rows of boots stood on two capacious shelves, above boxes of hosiery and coarse clothing of every description; while a chest of common saddles and bridles, and another of rough blankets, some American axes, picks, and shovels, completed

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the bulkier contents of the place. From the roof hung tin "billies," saucepans, cooking pots, and various smaller articles used by Bushmen. Rows of tinned jams, potted meats, bottles of pickles, and similar luxuries, occupied other shelves—for the men, disgusted with the perpetual salt junk, would now and then "plunge" in the store, and spend a weeks' wages on sardines from the Mediterranean, raspberry jam from England, or salmon from British Columbia.

"This is about the best stocked store in the district," observed Bill. "We've got close on four ton of flour in now, about half a ton of sugar, and all that tea—and more on the way up. When the squatters round about run short and send over here for some stuff, the 'boss' does make 'em pay through the nose for it. When the floods are out, and their drays can't get up, they come begging here for sugar, and glad to get it for sixpence a pound, and tea's cheap to 'em then at seven shillings a pound—they *must* have it—and baccy, best Victorian plug (it's ten shillings a pound to our men),

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many a half-hundredweight I've sold out of this for double. They are obliged to give the men tea, and flour, and sugar, whatever it costs, because that's in the rations. But baccy's a treat the chaps 'll fork out for to any amount."

On the right hand side of the counter was a small shelf holding a number of bottles containing pills of various sorts, and a large brown jar with a label on it—"strychnine."

"That's the med'cin chest," observed Bill.

"What!" exclaimed Harold. "You don't give people strychnine, surely?"

"Oh no," laughed Bill, "that's 'patent stomach ache' for the dingoes, when they've been killing sheep. You'll know how to use that before you've been here long." And, taking off the lid of a case of Hollands, "Here's another sort of med'cin—a good lotion for the men's insides after a hard day's work in the stock-yard, if they like to pay thirty shillings a bottle for it. They won't get a drop else from the 'boss.' Here's the meat store," he continued, showing them into an adjoining building, surrounded by pickling tubs and meat blocks,

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with a massive slab at the end, strong hooks all round the walls, and some large bags of coarse salt piled in a corner. "We shall want to kill to-morrow, or next day, Mr. Bertram, and then, if you give me a hand, you'll see how it's done; and, by-the-by, you'll be wanting a few things out of the store, the 'boss' said, until your trunks come up, which won't be for a month yet, likely."

A sum of twenty pounds had been placed with MacNab to the credit of each of the young men, and he was anxious that they should spend it as soon as possible in his store, and ask for fresh remittances.

"I'm storekeeper just now," said Bill. "Let's see, moleskin trousers" (a kind of rough fustian), "belts and pouches, butcher knives, blucher boots —you've got blankets and billies—and a saddle-pouch is very useful. Don't have any of these trashy leather hobbles, I'll make you a pair out of green hide. The saddles, too, are common English stuff, and the wrong shape for our horses. Tell the boss you'll wait till you can pick up a good colonial article. He'll have

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to lend you those you rode up on for the present."

The "outfit" having been entered in the day-book, Bill handed them the account with the remark, "That's the price of the things on the list here. He makes a lot out of 'em." So thought the buyers, when they found themselves paying twenty-five shillings for a pair of rough ankle boots, which would be dear at seven shillings and sixpence at home; one pound for a pair of shoddy trousers, to be bought for four shillings in any "slop" shop; ten shillings for a common leather belt and pouch, worth about three shillings; six shillings for the knife and sheath; and fifteen shillings for the saddle-pouch.

"Here's my 'humpie,'" said the overseer, opening the door of an ordinary hut, similar to those occupied by the shepherds on the run. The fireplace usurped about a fourth of the whole interior—eighteen feet by twelve feet—and a plank, nailed upon four posts driven into the earthen floor, served as a table. The bed, a couple of sheets of bark nailed upon posts

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some two feet high, had, as an excuse for a mattress, a thick-wooled sheepskin, over which were the usual blue blankets, and a pillow of sheepskin stuffed with dried ferns. Two good saddles, with their bridles, hung on pegs, and over the fireplace an Enfield carbine and double-barrelled gun rested in green hide slings. Along the wooden walls were hung several fine skins of the dingo, with their "brushes" suspended above—trophies these of many a hard ride with kangaroo hounds after the marauders. A small bullock trunk contained the rest of Bill's household gods, which he exhibited with an evident feeling of pride to his visitors.

On the following day it was arranged by MacNab that Keene should be installed as storekeeper, that Harold should be ration-carrier as soon as he became acquainted with the position of the huts on the run, and that both should do any odd jobs about the place.

"And, by-the-by," added the squatter, addressing Harold, "you may as well take a turn out with the crawlers to-day up the creek."

Keene then went to the store to take his first

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lesson from Bill in attending to the men about the head-station who came for their rations, and Harold, having borrowed the overseer's gun for the chance of a shot at any game he might meet with, drove, or rather followed, the miserable sheep out of their pen into the Bush. What a wretched lot! Some with bare patches of dull red all over them, where the scab insect had killed the wool; others limping along on three legs; some going painfully on their fore knees, their hoofs being destroyed by "foot-rot," while many stood still now and again to pass through a long paroxysm of hollow coughing—sure indication of the presence of the fatal lung-worm. Their shepherd moved about among them, and contemplated his charges. Greatly to his surprise, on grasping the matted wool of a fine-looking but emaciated ram, he found his fingers pricked as though he had squeezed a bag of needles. The poor beast's fleece was crowded with the pointed seeds of the arrow-grass, which work their way into the flesh and pierce the internal organs, inflicting a lingering death.

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It was anything but pleasant work, walking after this mob of hospital patients, which by midday had crawled scarcely a mile from home; but it afforded him many opportunities of taking note of the surrounding country during his first day on foot in the Bush. How was it possible, he wondered, that any man could ride straight for long distances through these gum forests, where each individual tree seemed to resemble its neighbour exactly—an impression common to every new arrival in the country? Here a tree and there a bush, which he felt certain he had passed a dozen times. Surely that dead, whitened trunk before him now was the same that he had seen early in the morning! And this conical mound (a white ants' nest)—why was he continually seeing it without looking for it? The trunks of the trees presented a singularly ragged appearance, the outer bark peeling in strips from them, or lying strewn upon the ground at their feet. Many of them also seemed to grow two kinds of leaves, broad and rounded on the suckers and young shoots near the ground, long and narrow on

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the old branches—shapes so very different, that it was long before he could make up his mind to the certainty that they belonged to one and the same tree.

Notwithstanding the uniformity of the forest, the repetition of similar forms—grey stems and pale green foliage—wherever the eye turned, there was something impressive and beautiful in the scenery, lighted up by the brilliant sunshine in the pure and invigorating autumnal air.

Now he strolled slowly along the banks of the creek, while the sheep lay down to rest, and flushed half a dozen pretty little ducks, whose plumage showed black and white as they rose from the water. One fell to his gun, and, to his supreme astonishment, the rest wheeled round, and—yes, there was no doubt of it—settled in the topmost branches of a high tree! On examining the bird,* he found that its bill was shorter and more arched than that of a duck; but, whether duck or goose, web-footed

* The so-called "wood duck;" really a goose, belonging to the genus *Nettapus*.

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birds had surely no business to perch in trees! A little further along the stream a blue-and-white kingfisher shot past him like an arrow, too rapidly to offer a chance. Out of a patch of ferns jumped a wallaby, which went away unscathed from both barrels, the sportsman being as yet unaccustomed to the quick turns of these animals.

Thus the long day passed, without any sense of tediousness, so interested was Harold in everything about him.

The sheep began to move homewards of their own accord, as the sun declined to the west, and one, unable to drag its worn-out carcase any further, laid down and died almost within sight of the pen.

Bill, on learning this, exclaimed "Ah, show me where it is. I must dose that."

The overseer, observing that the skin was not worth taking off, made several deep gashes with his belt knife about different parts of the body, and taking a small packet of strychnine from his pouch, dropped a few grains into each cut.

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"There's a belly-ache for you, master dingo, when you are looking out for supper to-night;" and, putting a pinch into each eye, "if any eagle hawk want's a nice little breakfast, that'll do *him*."

Harold asked whether some of the station dogs might not get poisoned.

"No fear—they're too well fed to care about this offal; besides, it's more than they dare, to touch a sheep with the skin on, dead or alive. You must have some of this stuff; and mind, you always dose a dead animal like this wherever you find it."

Next morning, the overseer requested Harold to bring the sheep home early, as he wanted to kill a beast before dark. When he arrived, he found that a fat bullock had been driven into the stock-yard from the paddock, with a couple of working oxen to keep him quiet, Keene and two station hands being ready to help in skinning and hoisting the beast on to the "gallows."

Bill brought out his carbine, and as soon as the beast moved conveniently near to the gallows, passed the muzzle of the weapon through

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the rails of the yard, waved his hat to attract its attention for a moment towards himself, and sent the bullet into its forehead at the spot where the hair forms a curl. The beast dropped on its knees and rolled over motionless. The men then climbed the fence, cut its throat, propped it on its back with short wooden supports, and began skinning away from the breast to the sides. All the dogs about the station, knowing what was about to take place, were in attendance, eagerly awaiting their share—the head and feet and inside of the animal—which they dragged about all over the yard, enjoying themselves immensely.

After half an hour's work, the bullock was ready for hoisting up to the "gallows." This arrangement consisted of two strong posts, ten feet high and five feet apart, placed in a corner of the yard, with a heavy roller working in slots in the upper ends. One end of the roller carried four long arms, to which were fastened green hide ropes for causing it to revolve, like a capstan placed horizontally. An extra-strong hide rope was wound over the

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roller, and the free end attached to a short wooden bar passed through the hamstrings of the bullock. A man seized each of the ropes on the windlass arms and turned the roller slowly, dragging the beast between the posts, and raising it clear of the ground to the height necessary for getting the skin off the back. When this was done, Bill took an American axe, and set to work to chop it into halves down the whole length from tail to neck, in a line by the side of the backbone, an operation which took some time and involved no little labour.

"There now," he remarked, viewing the splendid meat with satisfaction, "a fresh feed all round to-morrow; and up early, boys, and get it into the salting-house before the crows want their breakfast."

And "up early" it was. Bill knocked loudly at the side of the room where Harold and Keene slept, got the horse-dray ready, and with their help carted the meat into the store and laid it out on the salting tables while the sun was yet scarcely lighting the tops of the trees. The cook came in to choose a prime piece for "the

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house," and Keene weighed out a few pounds each for the men, to be included in their weekly rations. Cutting up, salting, and stowing away the meat in the pickling-tubs occupied the best part of the morning.

Bill, with the dray, and two men with pack-horses, went round to supply the distant shepherds; Keene had enough to do in the store for the rest of the day, and Harold betook himself to the uncongenial task of walking out with the crawlers.

The same evening his first introduction to an opossum took place in company with "Grip," the rough terrier. Grip belonged to nobody in particular, though the cook was supposed to have some claim to ownership in him. He was everybody's dog in turn, when any fun was going on. Whatever question there might be as to proprietorship in him, he never entertained any doubt of his own right and title to the whole of Wallaroo and everything connected with it. No one could fail to see this in his very manner of walking about with that stump of a tail carried at right angles to his back, and the pre-

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ternatural air of self-importance on his solemn countenance.

After a minute inspection of the new arrivals, he had welcomed them to Wallaroo with that gracious condescension peculiar to him, and set them down in his mind as "all right." Grip was a mighty hunter, besides. Nothing came amiss to him in the way of sport, from a grasshopper to an "old man" kangaroo.

Soon after supper, Harold heard Grip's war-cry at some little distance behind the house, and found him staring steadily up a tree.

Nothing whatever was to be seen, but Harold began climbing up the slippery trunk to the accompaniment of the dog's vociferous assurances that there was no mistake about the matter.

On gaining the first branch, he could just make out a dusky form crawling stealthily up the stem above him. Higher and higher, to the very topmost branches, where an opossum sat eyeing him with evident uneasiness. "Now I've got you," thought Harold, as he stretched out his hand to grasp the creature by the neck.

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Not so fast, Mr. "New Chum." You don't understand the wily opossum yet! The animal jumped upon the head of his would be captor, ran down his back, and disappeared. The sudden surprise of this unexpected movement almost made Harold lose his hold. The exciting barking of the dog indicated that he now saw the quarry. At the end of a bough clung the opossum with feet and tail, provokingly out of reach. Harold crawled along as far as it would bear his weight, shaking the branch violently. But his utmost efforts were unavailing. Within ten or twelve feet hung the opossum, swinging to and fro, but relaxing nothing of his tenacious grasp. "Now," said Harold to himself, getting out his knife, "at last I'm master of the situation." The branch was as thick as his wrist, and already borne down by his weight. Surely, however, he could cut it off between himself and the little acrobat at the end, who would then fall into Grip's clutches. The wood turned out to be extremely tough. He worked away patiently until there were signs of its giving way. It bent a little. Then a sudden rush, and before

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he could realize what had happened, the opossum dashed along the under-side of the bough, clung for a moment to Harold's dangling legs in passing, and left him in a state of blank bewilderment.

Grip scampered round to the opposite side of the tree. There, again, hung the opossum in perfect security at the end of another branch. Harold could not help laughing at his own failure, while admiring the intelligence of this clever little creature who had twice defeated him. He had exhausted all his resources. How could he meet such tactics? At this rate he might hunt the opossum about the tree all night, and come no nearer to its capture. So, descending, he walked back to the house, feeling acutely conscious of the reproaches which disappointed Grip must have been silently heaping upon him.

"I suppose you had rather come up the creek to-day with me and get some of my horses in, than take out those poor wretches?" said the overseer the first thing in the morning, addressing Harold, who was pleased with the opportunity of seeing something of the run.

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"Very well, then, Pompey shall look after them. The mob feeds about seven miles away on the grass-tree flats, and we'd better make a start at once."

Nothing could have been more pleasant than the ride through the beautiful and diversified country, along a ridge between Myall Creek and the Maranoa, with glimpses at intervals through the forest of the thin stream on the one side and the broad river on the other. Jogging easily along, Harold had many questions to ask, which his companion answered readily, thus picking up much useful information regarding the management of stock and Bush life generally.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Bill, when they emerged from a dense patch of brigalow scrub, "there's a dingo," putting his spurs into his horse, but pulling up almost immediately, with the remark, "That's what he was after," as a singular object, from which some carrion birds lazily rose, caught his eye.

"What is it?" inquired Harold, riding up.

"A black fellow's grave, and pretty fresh

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too; but smells a bit. The crows have been at it, and master dingo was loafing round for a taste. I didn't think they buried in that way up here. I've seen only one before—that was in the Murrumbidgee district."

On four saplings, about five feet high, driven into the earth, with cross-pieces fixed to them, and supported by a quantity of bark and boughs, lay the corpse, which had been covered roughly with long grass and ferns. Here and there were stuck a few fresh-water mussel shells, peeled sticks, and lumps of white quartz, by way of decoration, but without any apparent regularity or idea of a design.

"That's a chief, I suppose," observed Bill, "else they wouldn't have taken the trouble to stick him up there out of the way of the dingoes. But the thing will soon get rotten, and down it will tumble with the first gust of wind.

"Do they generally *bury* their dead, then?" asked Harold.

"Well, they grub a shallow trench sometimes, and cover it with earth; but I believe they

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mostly burn them—it's much easier. Besides, they have a ceremony then, and eat parts of the body. What they do that for I don't know, when there's plenty of game too. Nobody knows much about it. They keep it to themselves; and it isn't very safe to go prying round the camps of wild Blacks at any time. I saw an old *gin* one day turn out her 'dilly-bag,'* and there was the charred hand and arm bone of a child, that she seemed to set much store by, along with a hunk of roast kangaroo that she began gnawing away at."

"What? Was she saving the child's hand to *eat?*" broke in Harold.

"Oh no, it looked months old—some sort of keepsake, very likely. I gave her a bit of plug tobacco, and asked her; but she wouldn't say."

Soon afterwards they came on the tracks of horses, and, following them up, found the mob feeding beside the banks of a small creek. The two men galloped round them and headed them towards the station, before long picking out those they wanted, letting the others return

* A long conical bag made of plaited rushes.

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to their feeding-ground, and got them into the yard in the course of an hour.

Bill, taking off his bridle, walked up to a fine bay, with a white star on its forehead, saying coaxingly, "Boxer—Boxer—steady now, old man." The horse turned towards him sniffing the air, while Bill quietly approached, placed his hand gently on the animal's neck, slipped the bit into its mouth, and buckled the bridle. Then, catching the mane-lock with his left hand, he was seated on the bare back in an instant. A few turns round the yard, the horse kicking up his heels meanwhile, and Bill brought him up to Harold.

"There he is," he said, slipping off, and letting the animal smell his hand, "he knows *me*, you see; but he's likely to be a bit uppish with you in the morning. You can use him as long as you like;" and, passing his hand over the powerful hind-quarters, "he'll teach you all about working cattle, if you let him have his own way with 'em. Why, I believe, he knows what they're going to do before they do themselves. He's as quick as a cat round

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a charging beast—never been touched by a horn yet—and one of my best, too."

Harold thanked Bill heartily for his generosity, and led Boxer off to the stable, where his owner pared off the rough edges of his overgrown hoofs, gave him a feed of corn, "to harden the grass inside him," and tied him up by a headstall ready for morning.

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CHAPTER IV.

A Turn round the Sheep Stations—Trespassing Cattle—The Ewe Flock—The Wether Flock—The Overseer discourses on the Management of a Run—Losses from Droughts and Floods—Harold becomes the Owner of a Colley—The "Bathurst Burr"—Some of the Wallaroo Cattle—Keene forms an Opinion of MacNab.

THE overseer suggested that Harold should ride round with him in the morning, and visit some of the sheep stations. For the first few minutes, Boxer proved a good "handful" to his rider, making sundry bucks and pulling hard on the snaffle, but evidently from mere light-heartedness after his long rest. When he settled down into steady work, his manners and action were perfect. Obeying the slightest inclination of the bridle to right or left with one hand—as all Australian horses are taught to do—and yielding to every pressure of the

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heel, he fully justified Bill's praise of him as a "thorough good one."

"I broke him in myself," said the overseer, "and took time about it, too. I never put him out of temper; so there he is, as quiet as a sheep —but wait till you see him on cattle! And mind, Mr. Bertram, never you think to get anything out of him with the spur. He won't stand it. He knows very well when he's doing his best. I lent him to a dunder-headed ass once, and my gentleman begins to dig into him. Boxer just caught him by the toe of his boot, and pulled the chap clean out of the saddle. Ha, ha, ha! he did look silly on his back there, staring at the sky; and didn't quite know how he got there. But, if he should happen to prop you off when turning a beast, he'll stand by till you get on again. Now, we'll go over to the three-mile hut first, and have a look at Mike's ewes. Here's a bit of rough country, with lots of dead timber about the ridges. Give Boxer his head."

Away they went for a hard burst over ground on which Harold thought no horse

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could possibly keep his legs. Huge whitened trunks lay scattered about, among grand forest trees, with their arms reaching in every direction, and often masked by patches of high ferns. Still, at a hard gallop went the horses; now leaping a falling trunk, now swinging round a standing tree, just grazing the rider's legs, and presently plunging down a steep gully, covered with loose stones, and up the opposite bank without the semblance of hesitation or a single false step.

Mike was just about to let out the sheep. Bill threw his bridle to Harold, took one of the hurdles from the gate of the enclosure, and, standing partly in the gap, prepared to count them. The sheep rushed through by twos and threes, the overseer checking them when they passed too rapidly, by putting his leg out, over which the animals bounded high in the air, exhibiting the most ridiculous alarm.

"Thirteen hundred and eighteen. One missing, eh?" said Bill.

"Yes; she died yesterday, out on the run; skin's hanging on the rail," replied Mike.

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"What did she die of?"

"Don't know. Had a bad cough."

"Well, did you dose it for the dingoes?"

"Yes."

"Got much foot-rot?" asked the overseer.

"Five or six—most of 'em getting better, since I pared their hoofs and blue-stoned 'em."

"They look well, Mike. Good day."

And the overseer rode off with his companion for the next hut.

"If the shepherd can't show the skin, we dock his wages the value of the sheep, because either the dingoes have got it or the Blacks have speared it, and it's his business to look after them."

"That seems rather hard," remarked Harold. "A sheep might die without being noticed."

"Can't help it; we must have some rule. But when a man does well by his sheep, we're not very strict. If the boss here had it all his own way, though, he'd dock ten shillings for every missing one, and then all the best men would just clear out."

At the edge of a belt of forest near a small

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flat, Bill suddenly pulled up, exclaiming, "Ah, that mob of cattle has no business here, so close to Mike's sheep."

"Cattle! Where? I don't see any."

"Half a dozen of 'em, just in the thin timber, moving about—but, I forgot, you're not used to spotting things in the Bush."

For all Harold could see, there was not a living creature in the direction pointed out; but the bellowing of a bull now came distinctly on the air. They rode slowly on for half a mile, when he at last became conscious of some objects stirring among the trees.

Putting his horse into a sharp canter, the overseer broke out, "I thought so; they're none of ours." Then, whirling his stock-whip round his head, one, two, three sharp cracks rang out like pistol-shots.

The cattle rushed off helter-skelter, with Bill close upon them at full speed, plying his whip on all within reach, the beasts flinching at every stroke. Boxer pulled hard.

"Don't let him head them. Hold him! Steady!" shouted Bill.

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Five minutes of this punishment proved enough for the purpose. The mob were started well towards the boundary of their own run, Bill remarking, with a well-satisfied chuckle, "After that scare, they won't stop in the next three miles—not till they get right down to the river, on their own ground. We don't want the scourings of old Smith's scrubs on our good grass. Well, now," asked Bill, stopping to cut up a pipe of tobacco, "could you find your way back to the head station, d'you think? It's five miles off."

Harold was obliged to confess that he could about as easily find his way to Brisbane. They must, he said, "have been coming south and east, because the sun had been generally over his left shoulder, and it was not yet noon, therefore he should make towards the north, allowing something for the movement of the sun in the meantime."

"Pretty good," said Bill approvingly; "but, supposing you couldn't see the sun, should you know the road by the lay of the country?"

"Not a bit of it."

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"Look here, then, wherever you are on Wallaroo, ride as straight to the west as you can, and you're bound to come on Myall Creek. You'll know pretty well whether you are above or below the station, and then follow the creek up or down. It's the easiest run I know of." (Harold thought, "What must a difficult run be like, then?") "We're close to the eastern boundary, by the blazed tree line. I'll show you." And, after a few moment's search, "There's the surveyor's mark." A large slice had been taken from the bark of a tree, and the broad arrow cut into the wood beneath. "The trees are blazed like this for ten miles in a straight line, every hundred yards or so—there's another—and, if you look out, you can't miss them."

"That's all very well for a man who can travel without them, but I don't believe I could follow half a dozen in succession."

"Oh, it'll all come quite natural to you in time—no fear. The run's only ten miles by five, or thereabouts; so nobody's likely to get bushed in *that* little bit. The head station's

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pretty nearly in the middle of the block, and there's ten shepherd's huts' scattered about it."

"How much do you consider the run worth?" asked Harold.

"We reckon, say, a pound a sheep—giving in the cattle, and horses, buildings, fences, drays, and the rest of it. Wallaroo ought to fetch quite £20,000 in the market. There's good stock on it, too; and it would carry nearly double the sheep. Out here, sheep are worth about eight shillings a head all round, cattle about two pounds a head, and horses—we've got two hundred of all sorts—four pounds a head. The wool clip is worth about £4,000 in some years, I dare say; but, then, the expenses are very heavy."

"Still, MacNab ought to be pretty well off, eh?"

"If it was *all his own*, he would. I doubt whether he's got £5,000 hard cash in it to-day. The rest's bankers' money, with a mortgage on everything, and paying, very likely, twelve or fifteen per cent. That knocks the gilt off the gingerbread—my word! Why, many a squatter

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goes flashing round and blowing about "his run," when, if you reckoned him up, he couldn't show the little bit I've scraped together these twenty years back, at stock-riding, shepherding, shearing, fencing, bullock driving—and, well there"—with a vicious crack of his whip—"he *isn't in it* with scores of men in this country who are obliged to take an overseer's place, because they can't wheedle round somebody with money to trust them."

"Donald MacNab, *Esquire*, is a long way from a fool either, though he muddles this station badly, at times. He runs far too many sheep with each shepherd in broken country like this. The man is obliged to keep a large flock together well under his eye for fear of the dingoes; and they don't spread out enough to get a good bellyful when grass is scarce. That's all very well on the old runs of the Darling Downs—no dingoes, no arrow-grass, no burrs, no Blacks. You can let two thousand or three thousand sheep feed away how they like. And, what with the improvement of the natural grasses by many years of feeding, and

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laying down artificial grasses, the pastures are quite different from out here. He doesn't understand lambing either, as he ought."

"What amount of capital would you think necessary for taking up new country and starting a station free of debt?" inquired Harold.

"I wouldn't attempt it unless I could put my hand on £10,000—but I should like double that a great deal better. You see, this is how it is. There's no unoccupied country now within two hundred miles of this worth having. You might lose half your sheep by floods or drought, taking them up. When you're on your run, there's the trouble with dingoes and Blacks for three or four years—perhaps the poison plant too. The further out you go the more it costs for wages, getting up stores, and getting your wool down. Anywhere more than three hundred miles from a port, it's a hard struggle for a beginner, and in bad seasons a tight pinch for the richest squatters.

"You'd hardly believe the changes here—floods all through one year, drought the next; sheep dying by thousands, the wool you do get

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worth very little; then three or four good seasons, together with a large increase and heavy clip—you're on your legs again, and making a fortune.

"At Roma, not far from here, only one shower of rain fell for eight months, some years ago. Down on the Bogan, too, they had five years' drought—no rain for more than half the months in the year. It ruined all the squatters who couldn't move out west or north with their sheep, and the cattle and horses cleared out of their own accord. They cut down the gum-trees to let the sheep nibble the dry leaves, but still they died. What a sight it was—thousands of sheep dropped about, and the air black with eagle hawks and crows attracted from all parts; and the men starving on starved mutton; not a taste of flour or sugar; for the drays couldn't get out to them with stores; all the kangaroos and wallabies dead or gone away, and not a bit of heart in anybody. The Bogan had shrunk down to a few shallow muddy pools miles apart, all fouled by the sheep running through them, and dropping down dead in them.

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And, to make it worse, awful scorching winds blew day after day from the west, bringing clouds of fine dust, cracking your skin and filling your eyes. There were some of the poor fellows bad with scurvy, crawling about blind with the blight, and hardly able to take care of themselves—let alone the sheep. I wonder how any lived through it—a good many didn't!

"Flood time's almost as bad. Between this and Ipswich, the drays have been four months on the road—bogged or stopped by the rivers. Down on the Barwan, ten years ago, we had flood after flood; and, when we did get it, every ounce of flour had cost two hundred pounds a ton!

"What happened on Yarrambool station—one of the largest on the Darling Downs—after a long drought? All the sheep were camped out on the plains to get grass. One evening the Condamine river came down in flood and caught them. For two or three days it had been raining hard all about the Main Range and the New England Ranges, but nobody at Yarrambool could tell that. These rivers wind

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for hundreds and hundreds of miles through flat country, and they're just muddy ditches in dry weather, ready to catch the water from all the creeks and ridges, and swell up in a few hours when the rain comes. Well, the flood came down the Condamine at a fearful pace—a bank of water six feet high and half a mile wide, they tell me—and I quite believe it—and swept all over the plains, knee-deep, for miles. The shepherds did their best to get their flocks on to the ridges, but the stupid brutes wouldn't move. Sheep never will when they're in a blue funk. A great storm, with thunder and hail, came along with the flood all down the valley of the Condamine. The flocks near the river got the worst of it. That night, the flood carried off four shepherds and twenty thousand sheep from Yarrambool run alone. There they were, a few days afterwards, when the water fell, in the bends of the river, piled up in heaps among drift timber, fencing, planks, hurdles, and lots of stuff from the country round.

"Now, that's enough to break a strong squatter's back—let alone a weak one's. No—

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you *must* have a good lump of capital now to start sheep-farming; and then, with good luck and good management, you ought to be pretty well in, after five years."

Harold had listened to this with considerable astonishment. It was not at all the kind of brilliant picture of prosperity, ease, and comfort which had been painted for him in England as that of a squatter's life in Queensland. Something more seemed to be necessary than to buy a few hundred sheep, wander with them over unlimited pastures, and presently settle down, a rich man, and go back to the old country every now and then for a pleasure trip. If all this were true, he must make up his mind to take the life with seriousness, to work hard and patiently, with all the intelligence he possessed, and bear misfortune manfully if it came to him. But where could he hope to find the capital, which Bill estimated at £10,000 as the lowest?

"Is there no other way of starting for yourself, then?" he inquired somewhat despondingly.

"Oh yes, several. You can take a share in a station, to put more stock on it, and have part

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of the increase. Or you can make a regular partnership with two or three others, clubbing together. But you must get hold of honest men—or—I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Bertram—if you mean stopping in this country, just you learn the business down to the ground. I don't care whether it's splitting a rail or bossing a big run; when you know it all, you're the master of every mother's son of 'em on the place. Let 'em see you can best 'em all round at any work. Then you're a match for any rogue—and he won't try it on. Never mind the rogues so much, so long as they're clever—but keep clear of the *fools*. They'll humbug any man, one way or another."

Part of a flock of sheep now appeared in the distance through the trees, and the overseer rode round them to speak to the shepherd and ask him a few questions. Meanwhile, Harold noticed how widely they spread out, and how fast they walked from one tuft of sweet grass to another.

Presently Bill rejoined him, and asked, "How many do you think there are of 'em?"

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"I can hardly make a guess. They seem to extend a long way in every direction—a very large number, I should think; perhaps between two and three thousand."

"That's always the way with new chums at first," said Bill, with a smile; "but it's very deceptive, I own. Now, there's just under fifteen hundred; and a fine strong lot of wethers they are. They'll march the shepherd ten miles a day, and a good deal more when grass is scarce, at times. Could you do a feed presently?"

Harold confessed that he certainly *could*. Accordingly they pulled up at a hut two or three miles further on, where the shepherd's wife opened the door and made them welcome to the usual fare. They then took off the saddles and let the horses have a nibble round in their hobbles, and had half an hour's "spell," for the overseer said he should cross to the other side of the run and look at some of the cattle in the afternoon.

Playing about the hut were a couple of fine colley pups, one of which came up to Harold,

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as he sat on a log, and made great friends with him.

"Now's your chance," said Bill, "if you want a good dog. They are stunners. I dare say you can have one"—and, calling out to the woman—"I say, missus, do you want to part with one of these pups?"

"Oh lor, yes, sir, and welcome. They a'most eats their heads off here; and I don't know what they'd do if my old man didn't get 'em a 'possum or a wallaby now and then."

Harold thanked the woman for her present of what was a really well-bred specimen of the short-haired colley; and Bill promised to send a man and the horse dray round in the morning with rails to repair some weak places in the sheep-yard, and bring the dog home with him.

"I can't make out why it is," observed Harold, when they had made a start, "that the shepherds have no gardens about their huts on this fine land. Won't vegetables grow?"

"Well, you see, the men have no time. Out the first thing in the morning—and a shepherd

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isn't worth his salt if he isn't—and home at sundown with the sheep. Then cooking, and looking after the cripples, patching up the yards, and one thing and another—the daylight's gone. But, grow! I don't know what *wouldn't* grow on this soil. Anything, so long as you put a close fence round it, to keep out the pademelons and bandicoots. They like pumpkins and sweet potatoes a good deal better than Bush grass. What with the dogs and the guns, we keep 'em down pretty well about the head station, and get a bit of maize and a few things to grow." Then, with a savage cut from his stock-whip, the overseer mowed down a plant growing by the side of the track, exclaiming, "There, you wretch—and I wish it had been the head of the silly ass that brought you into the country! You've heard the story, I suppose?" turning to Harold. "No? Well, they say a Scotchman down at Bathurst got to pine so for want of seeing something he was used to, that he sent home for a packet of seeds of Scotch 'wild flowers,' and put 'em into a bit of cultivation ground. Among the

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rest up came this rampin' burr, and he was all cock-a-hoop about it. It looked so home-like. The blasted thing seeded, and got carried all over the country by the sheep, stuck in their wool; and it's everywhere now. It ruins the fleeces, balling up the wool so that they can't comb it out in the factories. It likes the best ground too. We haven't got so much of it here; but on some runs it's in all the flocks. Never let a chance slip of nipping it off before the seeds are ripe."

"I notice you haven't killed any sheep since I've been here," observed Harold; "how's that?

"Kill a sheep! NacNab would as soon pitch sovereigns into the wash-pool as kill and eat a sheep! *Wool* grows outside mutton; and it don't do to eat it. The little squatters are obliged to sometimes, because they can't always kill a beast just to suit them, and so do we now and then, in summer, when the beef all goes bad in the pickling-tubs."

They were now riding down a long slope towards a broad stretch of treeless, level ground.

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Bill drew rein, and looked steadily across the beautiful landscape. "There's the mob," he said. "Now, Mr. Bertram, keep a good hold on Boxer's head. When he sees 'em, he'll likely think he ought to take 'em up to the stock-yard, and pull you right on to his neck. He knows every mob on this run, and he's yarded that one many's the time—so, look out. Here, get on this old crock for a bit, and let me have him."

Accordingly, they changed horses and went on slowly towards the cattle, which looked up uneasily and began to bunch together at the sight of the horsemen, though the latter were still not within a quarter of a mile of the beasts.

"How they do thrive on these flats, with the nice dry camps on the ridges at night. Bless my soul, the boss don't know what a bit of country he's got! There's four hundred beasts there, and not a sick 'un amongst 'em. But that old white-faced bull—we'll have to shoot him soon. He worries all the young 'uns out of the mob."

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"How very quiet they are," remarked Harold.

"That's all right now, because they're used to seeing mounted men. If you went down near them on foot, ten to one the whole mob would charge, the cows worst of all, and then I wouldn't give a pound note for your life. I believe cattle think the man and horse one animal when he's after 'em and giving 'em pepper with the stock-whip; but they know they can easily mash up the little thing going on two legs. Yonder's Myall Creek, look! We'll follow it up home, and then you'll have ridden round half the run to-day."

Many a beautiful spot was to be seen on the creek, where it wound its way through forest and scrub, and amongst reedy swamps, dotted over with wild fowl. On the other side, a broad fringe of rich level land extended far beyond the boundary of Wallaroo. Over this fat pasture, herds of cattle were grazing, or stringing off to the drinking-places before going to their respective camps on the ridges for the night.

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It had been a glorious day, with the sun unclouded throughout, a gentle air blowing from the north, and as warm as an August day in England, but without its sultriness. Nothing, Harold thought, could be finer than this climate on the Maranoa in the autumn month of May; nothing more suggestive of absolute freedom than the liberty to ride straight away as far as one chose in any direction unquestioned, and meet with a welcome at every shepherd's hut or squatter's house in this favoured land.

"How would you like to take a turn at shepherding—say a week with Mike and the ewes, then a week with a wether flock, then with the rams, and so on?" asked Bill. Harold assenting to the proposition, the overseer continued. "Unless you make a move, the boss will be for keeping you pottering about with the crawlers, scaring cockatoos off the cultivation paddock, and doing all sorts of odd jobs. So long as you pay up, whatever it is, for him to teach you sheep-farming, and just do enough to earn your tucker, he don't care a straw if

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you can't tell a sheep from a working bullock at the end of the year. You'll have to stop another, and another, and go on paying him for nothing. Then, if he thinks he can worm some money out of your people, to put into the station, the less you know about things the better for his book. There's too many of 'em like that—not but what there's plenty of the good sort about too, when you can find 'em. So just you show him you mean business."

On comparing notes with Keene, in the evening, Harold found that he had formed a very unfavourable opinion of MacNab. The young storekeeper had posted up the books to date, taken stock of the materials in store, worked out a clear debtor and creditor account from the muddle of vouchers and figures, and showed the squatter a considerable profit on the transactions of the past year. As the intention of Keene in coming into the Bush was merely to make himself familiar with the commercial side of squatting life, with a view to future participation in the affairs of Keene and Co., of Brisbane, he would have been well

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pleased had MacNab allowed him an insight into the accounts of the station itself No hints on this subject, however, met with any encouragement from the squatter, who, nevertheless, had expressed himself satisfied with the business-like condition of the storekeeping department.

"He's a close-fisted nipper, Harold," said Keene, summing up. "You should see him loaf about the store and watch the scales when I'm weighing out rations; and he had the cheek to growl once, when I gave a trifle the best of it to the men, when the sugar had got low and all treacly, and mixed with chips of rushes from the bag. And then he'll pretend to help me with the meat, and fork out all the bony pieces from the pickling-tubs to send to the shepherds. Well, that sort of thing won't do for me; so I offered him the key of the store yesterday, and told him that if he couldn't trust me to be fair all round to everybody, he must find somebody he could. He seemed quite astonished, and mumbled something about a little direction being useful to a beginner, and

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that sort of rubbish, and we must be strict with the men, or they'll expect more every time, and so on. Bosh! that's nothing to do with it. Anyhow, I took it to be some sort of apology—as much as he knew how to make, perhaps—and I said, 'Very well, then, Mr. MacNab, you understand me, I hope?' And I put the key into my pocket, and walked away. But I've taken the man's measure, Harold."

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CHAPTER V.

Shepherd Life in the Bush—Out on the Sheep Run—Primitive Cookery—The Right Way to make a "Damper"—Washing Day, and what the Sheep thought of it.

HAROLD started off a day or two afterwards to walk over to Mike's hut, carrying his "swag," consisting of two blankets and a spare shirt and pair of socks, across his shoulders, his billy slung to his belt, and leading the refractory young colley by a cord. "Don," as he named the promising youngster, after the faithful old setter at home, had not yet forgotten his mother, and did not take kindly to a walk, he knew not whither, with a stranger.

Notwithstanding Harold's somewhat confident assurance to Bill that he could find his way easily for that short distance, barely three miles, he would probably have been "bushed" had he

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not accidentally met Mike going homewards with his flock, being then at least a mile out of the right direction, and likely to become entangled in a piece of broken, scrubby country on the bend of the Maranoa. Almost due east he knew the course should be; but the rapidly changing position of the sun insensibly led him too far to the northward. He was now able to realize the actual difficulty of going direct through an Australian forest to a solitary hut, which might be passed unobserved at a distance of two hundred yards, though he had visited it only a few days before.

Mike took in the situation, and bade him "good day" with a grin.

"So the 'super' says you're coming to have a turn at shepherding along with me. All right; there's a spare bunk in the hut, and I likes a bit o' company."

Mike's dog, a nondescript animal, devoid of even the stump of a tail, scantily clothed with hair as coarse as brush bristles, and of a dirty white colour, with the exception of a black patch over one of his fine, intelligent eyes, made

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the acquaintance of the colley, and wagged his long body approvingly after smelling Harold's legs. "Smut's" title to fill the important position of a sheep-dog could never have been predicted from his external appearance. But within that gaunt, muscular frame—a match for any dingo, as it had often proved—was a wise and gentle spirit, of great value in the management of ewes and their troublesome lambs.

The sheep-yard at Mike's consisted of the usual circular post-and-rail enclosure, four feet high, strongly banked all round the outside with boughs interlaced and further secured by stakes. Strength is absolutely necessary, for very great pressure is exerted by a large number of sheep rushing round in the yard when frightened by a dingo sniffing about the enclosure; and the circular form is designed to prevent crowding in corners, where the pressure would break down the fence or crush some of the sheep to death. It is the shepherd's business to keep a watchful eye on the weak places, and either repair them or report to the overseer, who sees that it is done.

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The valuable flock of fifteen hundred picked ewes entrusted to the care of Mike ran on a choice piece of country, where a dingo now rarely appeared, so persistently had the war of extermination against them been carried on by poisoned baits; so that the shepherd was seldom roused at night by any uneasy movement of his sheep. The natives, too, when they were in the neighbourhood, camped some ten miles to the north, towards the upper waters of Myall Creek, on ground which provided them with abundance of food. For a distance of about two hundred yards round, the grass was kept carefully burnt down, in order to protect the hut and sheep enclosure from Bush-fires. A small creek, with here and there water-holes in its course, which had never been known to dry up, ran within a minute's walk of the sheep station on its way to the Maranoa lagoons, through some of the best-grassed land on Wallaroo. With all these advantages, Mike's run would easily have carried another thousand sheep. Harold's first experience of shepherding a large flock was thus to be gained in the most

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favourable circumstances, and in company with a man who understood the business thoroughly.

On arriving at the sheep-yard, Mike caught some ewes which showed signs of lameness, and proceeded to dress them for foot-rot. Turning the patients on their backs, he pared away the diseased parts of the hoof with his knife, and rubbed it over with blue-stone—an operation attended with considerable pain, as might be judged by the frequent blinking of the sheep's eyes.

Soon after daybreak, the men having made a hasty breakfast, and provided themselves with a slice of damper and beef for dinner, the impatient flock was allowed to go out to pasture.

"Take 'em down the creek to-day," said Mike, waving his hand in answer to Smut's inquiring glance.

The dog trotted off round the scattered flock, gradually turned it in the desired direction, and returned to his master's side.

"Smut never barks unless there's something up," he remarked. "Either a dingo about, or something wrong with a sheep. Last week, one

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f 'em got tied fast in a creeper, and he kicked up such a hullaballoo, you never heard. Ten to one she'd 'a been strangled, and I shouldn't 'a know'd, if he hadn't found her."

As the flock moved steadily onwards, Harold observed how almost completely it disappeared now and then in the long dry grass, among which the small tufts of green feed grew; more especially when the ground became at all uneven, and the forest thicker than usual. Sometimes he could not be sure of counting a hundred of them, while the leaders might be a quarter of a mile from the shepherd, down in a gully, or hidden by the undergrowth. To one accustomed to seeing flocks on the bare Yorkshire moors, this method of tending sheep in a forest of immense gum-trees, among ferns and long grass withered by the summer sun, was a complete revolution of ideas. Spain, Saxony, Leicestershire, and the Cotswold Hills had contributed to the formation of the long fine fleeces carried by these sheep, grazing almost within the tropics, many thousands of miles from their ancestral homes; and probably

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the very flannel of the shirt he was wearing contained as much Australian as English wool.

From time to time, when, in the judgment of the shepherd, the flock had spread too much, a word to Smut would send him off to bring the stragglers in towards the main body. Moving them together without any fuss, the knowing dog took care to look into places where a stray sheep might be concealed, and returned in a wide circle to avoid disturbing them when they had again begun feeding. About noon they began to show signs of fatigue and fulness, and the dog rounded them up, passing slowly from one side to the other, and back again, until the whole flock lay down to rest and chew the cud. This was the opportunity for dinner, each man sharing his provisions with his dog. Don had already become tractable, and even disposed to follow Smut on his rounds; but this could not be permitted, for the youngster might easily have been lost; and the sight of a strange dog amongst them would have caused a stampede of the sheep.

Mike decided on an early return to the hut,

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in order to do a little cooking, as the ration-carrier would have left the fresh supplies for the week. Accordingly, as soon as the sheep began to move again, he gave Smut the order, "Home, boy!" and in a few minutes the whole flock had been turned in the required direction. On the way home, the shepherd suddenly caught hold of Harold's arm, exclaiming, "See them squatters?" and picking up a short thick piece of stick. On a bare patch of ground, scarcely half a dozen yards from them, was a small rounded heap, which Harold at first took for horse-droppings. Mike threw his missile with good aim, and two small pigeons lay fluttering on the ground, while five or six more flew from the spot to a low branch, and sat perfectly motionless. Regretting that he had not brought his gun, with which he said he could have bagged the whole lot as they sat on the tree, Mike remarked that these birds always squatted on the ground, huddled up, in the hope of avoiding observation, and might be approached within a few feet.

Having yarded the flock, with still two hours

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of daylight to spare, Mike made preparations for cooking a supply to last the next three or four days. Harold was instructed to collect a quantity of wood and light a large fire outside the hut. Meanwhile Mike examined the week's rations left at the hut during the morning, brought out an empty flour sack, folded it carefully in half, laid it upon the ground, and spread over it about five pounds of flour. Then, clearing a circular space in the middle of the heap, much in the way that builders mix mortar, he filled it up with water and gradually worked the flour from the outside inwards, until a mass of very stiff dough had been formed. Kneeling before the sack with his sleeves turned up, the shepherd kneaded the dough vigorously, now flattening it out, then rolling it over and over, thus mechanically incorporating the air with it, and keeping hard at work for half an hour. The dough was now so stiff that, when patted out into the form of a cake three inches thick, it might almost have been trundled along the ground without losing its shape. Harold had by this time got up

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a fire large enough to roast a sheep. Mike pulled off the half-burnt brands, and carried them into the hut to start another fire, leaving behind only a mass of glowing embers. Raking these together, he stirred them for some time, to drive off all the dust, and then with a long stick worked them away from the centre, forming a semi-circle of red-hot, smokeless pieces of charcoal. Into this clear space, upon the bare, heated ground, he skilfully dropped the great cheese-shaped dough cake, and left it some minutes "to get the outside used to the the heat," as he said. Finally, the embers were raked together, spread evenly over the cake in the form of a low mound, and this primitive out-of-door oven was left to do its work.

Mike next set a large galvanized iron bucket, three-parts full of water, to boil on the hut fire, and, as soon as it began to simmer, put into it a four or five pound piece of salt beef. It was now time to prepare supper. Harold plucked the pigeons, which Mike split open and laid upon the red-hot embers to broil. The water

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was boiled in the billies, and the tea dropped upon the surface. With an iron spoon, Mike skimmed the fat from the water in which the beef was boiling, and mixed it with some flour in a tinned dish to make a stiff paste for the "johnny cakes." These thin pieces of paste, the size of a saucer, were carefully laid on the embers, and at the other side of the fire some slices of lean beef were set to cook in the same way. With the bucket in the middle, and the pigeons, beef, "johnny cakes," and billies arranged round it, an appetizing smell, compounded of fried fat, boiled beef, and tea rose from the fire, and made even Smut fidget about from one place to another with pleasant anticipations.

Mike had furnished his hut luxuriously—so to speak. The iron bucket, a frying-pan, a large tinned dish, such as is used by miners for washing out alluvial gold, a couple of tinned plates, and a few other cooking utensils, bought at extravagant prices from MacNab's store, raised him to the position of a "blooming swell" among the Wallaroo shepherds. His

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sugar was kept secure from the ants in an old coffee tin, and his tea in a pickle bottle. A tin that once had contained American lobster served, with a piece of paper tied over the top, to hold the fat for cooking purposes, and for supplying the lamps; and the lamps themselves were sardine tins half full of rancid grease, with a strip of old cotton shirt stuck against one side by way of a wick.

But, with all these creature comforts, Mike was not a personally cleanly man. Soap had been long a stranger to his skin, and water made its acquaintance far too seldom. Harold noticed, with a qualm at his stomach, that the hands which had been employed in kneading the damper, looked as if they had parted with an accumulation of dirt during the process. Nevertheless, such considerations did not prevent him from doing justice to the supper, which the shepherd's long experience of Bush cookery rendered as palatable as any hungry man could desire. From time to time, Mike poked an iron skewer into the beef, to ascertain how it was doing, and, when the meal was finished, wiped

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his knife on the leg of his trousers, and went out to see after the damper. Raking off the covering of embers, he tapped the browning crust with a stick, and thrust the point of his knife into it. "Gettin' on fine," he reported, and covered it up. The last thing before turning in, he drew it out of the now powdered and still smouldering ashes, laid it on the flour sack, tapped it again knowingly, with the remark, "Sounds holla—all right," carried it into the hut, and set it on edge to cool. Its rich colour and peculiarly pleasant smell told his practised senses that this was a triumph of the art of bush cookery—a well-baked damper.

After the first fortnight of it, Harold was obliged to confess to himself that shepherding was monotonous work, and he now understood the eagerness of the men for a periodical change to the riot and drunkenness of a "spree" in the miserable shanties, where at least human companionship of some sort could be found. To trudge, day after day, from year's end to year's end, behind a flock of sheep, could not but depress the mind of any man, even if he

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possessed considerable resources of intelligence and education. He had availed himself to the utmost of Mike's experience of the Bush, and felt that he should have no hesitation in taking charge of a flock on his own responsibility. He believed that he was able now even to distinguish individually the countenances of half the ewes in this flock, which at first had appeared to be so exactly alike, with the same curved horns and yellow eyes—each face the very counterpart of every other. At all events, he was certain of this. Some he recognized as always to be seen in the place of leaders, others on each flank, and again others bringing up the rear. This arrangement, which was so constant as to preclude the idea of its being accidental, could be observed more especially when the sheep were well together, in going from and returning to the yard. Could this, he asked himself, be an instance of the revival of a long-dormant instinct—the habit, common to many wild gregarious animals, of placing scouts to warn them of an approaching enemy; and had it become re-established in these descendants of

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domesticated sheep, when brought into circumstances resembling those in which their wild ancestors had originally lived?

The rusty and dangerous-looking single-barrelled gun—which Mike, finding Harold to be a good shot, had made over to him with an eye to economy in ammunition—kept the larder well supplied with ducks and pigeons, and the dogs with as much wallaby meat as they could stow away. Now and then, but rarely, a wily white cockatoo came to bag, whose lean, dark flesh, when roasted on a slow fire, might have tempted an epicure; and more than once that exquisite delicacy and prince of pigeons, the wonga-wonga, was added to a bill of fare which would gratify the most fastidious appetite.

It was something like a relief from the usual routine when Mike suggested that Harold might as well spend a day at the hut getting together a good stack of wood for the approaching cold winter nights, and do a little washing. The shepherd routed out from a corner a pair of moleskin trousers and a cotton shirt, which had lain there since the last lambing season, and

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tying an arm of the shirt to a leg of the trousers, and telling Harold to bring his things, went down to the creek. He sank the articles of clothing in a shallow place, dropping upon them a few stones to keep them in position, that they might soak all night. Harold's contribution to the wash was a pair of socks—Mike never wore socks, except in winter—and a flannel shirt, which were secured in the same manner.

The first thing in the morning, after the sheep had gone out, Harold set to work cleaning up all the cooking utensils with fine ashes, and making the hut tidy in a general way. The large bucket now came in handy for carrying soil up from the creek, with which he made a gigantic mud pie, and plastered up the spaces between the slabs of the hut where the night wind found an entrance. The washing proved no easy task—without soap. All the rubbing, wringing, and rinsing he could bring to bear on Mike's trousers and shirt failed to make them presentable or wholesome in appearance; and he could not claim much greater success

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with his own. Consoling himself, however, with the reflection that the purity of the water must have done some good to the garments, he hung them on the sheep-yard fence to dry, and betook himself to the collection of firewood. The afternoon was drawing to a close before he realized how busy he had been all day without having much to show for it. There was no time to go down the creek and look for a duck. He must hurry up and boil the water for the tea, as the distant bleating of the sheep coming home reminded him. A few minutes afterwards, an amusing scene was presented by two or three hundred of the foremost of the flock standing in serried phalanx at some distance round the sheep-yard, afraid to advance further. A few of the boldest spirits ventured forward a few steps, stamping their feet with an air of determination and defiance, but running back immediately when the wind happened to raise the arm of Mike's shirt in a threatening manner. These ghostly presentments of the human form hanging on the fence of their home were evidently a novel and alarming spectacle. Harold

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stood laughing at their perplexity for a minute, and gathered up the clothing, while Smut came bustling to the front in astonishment at the refusal of his charges to move on, hurried them into the yard, and went stealthily round the enclosure to search for "that dingo" which was the abiding worry of his existence.

"Ah," remarked Mike, on hearing of the episode, "the fools of monkeys,* they'd 'a been off into the Bush like a shot, if Smut hadn't been handy to keep their pluck up a bit."

* A familiar colonial term for sheep.

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CHAPTER VI.

Return to the Head Station—Extraordinary Leap of Bullocks—A Bitter Morning in the Salting-house—Off to the Lagoons for Sport—Harold's First Night in the Bush—Pompey hears the "Bunyeep"—A Morning Salute from Laughing Jackasses—Duck Shooting—"Cod" Fishing—Opossum Shooting by Moonlight—The "Bell-bird"—Snipe Shooting round the Lagoons—A Miscellaneous "Bag."

A MONTH or so more, spent at different shepherds' huts, rendered Harold pretty familiar with the elements of the business, and enabled him to gain some knowledge of the run. He then thought it high time to ride over to the head station on Boxer (who had been brought out by the overseer to the five-mile hut, where Harold had passed a week with the ram flock), to overhaul his trunk, which had arrived by bullock dray. A good supply of serviceable clothing, flannel shirts, Bedford cords, etc., laid out on the floor of Bill's hut, elicited unquali-

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fied admiration from the overseer; who was with difficulty prevailed upon to take a pair of riding breeches and a few other articles which their owner pressed him to accept. Almost reverentially did Bill handle and examine the new double-barrelled gun, designed by Messrs. Bland for colonial work, and the five-chambered breech-loading revolver. The binocular particularly took his fancy.

"Why, I could spot a mob of cattle miles away with this," he said, looking across the plain beyond the creek, "and save no end of riding."

The pocket compass, too, came in for approval; but he scarcely understood the use of the delicate thermometer, five inches long, cleverly protected from damage in its revolving cylinder case.

"Well, you're set up for a year or two, anyhow," he remarked, "and won't want to trouble the rubbish in the store; but, come along, and help me get in a beast for killing, and just sling that bully spy-glass round your neck."

Half an hour's smart cantering brought them

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to the feeding-ground of the cattle from which Bill intended to select his beef.

"Now, where's that red white-faced bull? Lend me the glass," he said, dismounting to take a steady look, and exclaiming in a few moments, "Ah, there he is; a fine lot of steers run with his mob. We'll bring up a few quiet cows along with them; but keep a good hold of Boxer, he's as fresh as paint."

Making a slight detour to head them off from their camping-ground, the men were soon among the cattle; Bill using his stock-whip with consummate skill to cut out the beasts he wanted, and leave the bull and most of the cows behind. Boxer completely took possession of his rider—turning to right or left as his experienced eye noted an inclination in any of the beasts to break back, while Bill would now and then spur his horse up to the flank of some one or other of the mob that looked like charging, and lay on his whip with a severity which sent the animal flying onwards. One by one, after the first mile, the cows and calves were allowed to drop out, and, when nearing home,

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the men had before them a compact body of a dozen steers, galloping straight away like horses.

Keene, hearing the crack of the whip, ran out and let down the slip-rails of the stock-yard. With a final rush the beasts were run in, and the rails smartly put up.

But Harold had yet to learn what Queensland cattle are capable of. They raced madly round the yard; then one bold spirit, leading the others, rushed at the fence and went gallantly over, just grazing his belly on the strong top rail, followed in succession by every one of his companions. Harold stood amazed. More than six feet was the height of the fence—all the rails of solid timber, which would not give an inch—yet these beasts, weighing at least a hundred and fifty stone each, played follow-my-leader over an obstacle that every horse on the run would have refused, though some rapped their legs severely.

"Hurrah!" shouted Keene, "away they go, the beauties. Talk about the 'Grand National,' it's nothing to a steeplechase of bullocks on the Maranoa!"

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The overseer looked vexed, and jumped on his horse, but, seeing how wildly they were going, said, "Hang the brutes; it's no use trying to get them in to-day; we should never bring them up to the yard again. Next time I want a beast out of that mob, I'll run some of the old cows right in with 'em to keep 'em quiet."

In answer to Harold's astonished question whether this was a common occurrence, he replied that the yards were built high enough to keep in anything, and generally did, but this was about as smart a lot as ever he had seen.

On the following evening, Keene's anxiety on account of his supply of meat was allayed by the sight of a fine fat bullock hanging on the "gallows." The salting process next morning proved more unpleasant than any one had anticipated. A sharp wind blowing from the south all night had rendered the carcase so cold that handling it made the fingers tingle. The grass and dead bracken were stiff with frost, and the rime sparkled on the fences in the first rays of the morning sun. For two

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hours, Harold, the overseer, and Keene worked away in the store, rubbing the salt into the meat with hands benumbed to the bone. Accustomed as Harold had been to tramping over the Yorkshire moors with his gun in the severest weather, he declared that he had never, until now, experienced the intense pain of cold. He could hardly lift the axe to chop the meat; the knife slipped from his fingers. The three men were scarcely able to lift a fifty pound piece of meat from the salting tables into the pickling-tubs, so little feeling was there left in their aching hands. Thoroughly welcome, then, was the cook's summons to breakfast, and the relief of washing off the brine and bringing back the circulation by rubbing their arms with a saddle-cloth.

What a contrast the middle of the day presented! The sun shone brilliantly, with a temperature little below that of an English summer. Several posts of the paddock-fence had been attacked by the white ants, and Harold was engaged with Bill and another man, during the greater part of the day, digging holes and

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sawing out the timber for replacing them. While at this work the perspiration ran down their faces as freely as ever Harold had known it when gathering in the harvest on Manor Farm.

"We shall be done with this job at the end of the week; what do you say to going over to the lagoons for a few days' sport?" asked Bill. A proposal which Harold eagerly accepted.

Accordingly, on Monday morning they set out on two steady old nags, with a pack-horse carrying their blankets, billies, damper, tea, sugar, etc., and a gridiron, which Bill had wheedled the cook into lending them for this occasion. Pompey, the old black fellow, who had long been a hanger-on at the station, living in his own bark gunyah near the wash-pool, was to lead the pack-horse, look after things generally, and act as retriever of the wild fowl.

Grip took stock of the preparations with a quiet eye, and graciously decided to accompany this expedition, and see that no opossums were let off after he had treed them. Don, now

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inseparable from his master, of course making one of the party.

While Pompey was left with instructions to get the camp ready, and collect firewood, etc., near the first lagoon, Harold and Bill occupied the day in riding along this beautiful chain of miniature lakes or basins which caught the overflow of the Maranoa. The largest were about a quarter of a mile broad and a mile or so in length, small rivulets connecting them here and there with the main stream. Magnificent timber grew all round them, and here, even in winter, the grass was rich and abundant. In summer, the shallower parts were glorious with acres of the pink water-lily,* and the reeds formed nurseries for innumerable families of black swans and every variety of water-fowl. Here, too, the shy platypus might be seen at play on the surface of the water in the evening twilight, or squatted on the banks cleaning its soft fur with its duck-like bill.

Coming back to camp, Harold wondered why

* *Nelumbium Leichhardtii*, flowering now every year in Kew Gardens.

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Pompey had lighted *two* roaring fires about five yards apart.

"We shall be glad of 'em, depend on it, before morning," said Bill.

After supper, the men rolled themselves in their blankets between the fires, with the dogs close to them, and the overseer at least was asleep in a few minutes; while Pompey, sucking a short pipe, crouched over a handful of embers at some little distance, under a rough shelter of sticks and boughs, set up with considerable skill.

The novelty of the situation—his first night out in the Bush—kept Harold awake for hours. A dense chilling mist came off the lagoons as the moon went down, through which he could see the stars shining brightly above, showing how short a distance it extended from the earth. He drew his blanket closer. Strange sounds came from among the trees. Now a sudden thud, as though a heavy beast had tumbled from a branch. Then a gentle stirring of leaves close at hand, suggestive of some creeping thing advancing stealthily. Presently

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a rush of wings overhead, a long swish in the water, and the quacking of ducks all over the lagoon answering the new arrivals. Thus Harold listened, and tried to interpret the various indistinct sounds far and near—in the forest, and away on the calm water, where the wild-fowl met—until the real faded into the ideal, and both finally gave place to unconsciousness.

How long he slept he could not tell. Don growled. The fires had burned low. Close beside them cowered Pompey, looking fixedly towards the forest.

"What's the matter, Pomp?"

"Tshish-h-h!" whispered the old man, pointing his long arm out into the dark. "Bunyeep sit down likey lagoon—Pompey berry great 'fraid—eat him up, poor old Pompey."

Whatever was the cause, the black fellow was evidently in a state of abject terror. Harold could make nothing of it. Suddenly a low moan, ending in a prolonged wail, caught his ear.

Pompey's face became more tragic than ever.

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He sprang to his feet, and in a sepulchral voice groaned out, "Bun-yee-eep."

Harold burst into a loud laugh. *Two branches rubbing together in the night wind* had created a veritable ghost for the Australian savage.

Bill muttered angrily from his blanket, "What's the old fool at now?" And with a few sharp words in the native language, ordered him to make up the fires, and be off to his "humpie."

Many times towards morning Harold awoke shivering, and drew up his legs under the blanket. With all his clothes on, his feet encased in thick woollen socks, and a soft felt billy-cock pulled well over his ears, he could not keep warm. The mist had cleared away before the morning breeze, and the frost hung upon the grass.

Bill shouted from his blanket, "Pompey, you old crow-bait, make up the fires."

The black fellow looked the picture of misery as he crawled from under his shelter—where he had taken care to keep up his own fire—and,

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wrapping his blanket round him, pushed the smouldering logs together with his bare feet as skilfully as only a native or an experienced Bushman can. In a very few minutes the flame rose from the mass of white ashes, and the fire was well started.

"How're you getting on? Chilly, eh?" asked Bill, lighting his pipe from a fire-stick handed him by Pompey, but still remaining wrapped up.

Harold had folded his blanket and pulled on his boots. "No mistake," he replied. "I could not have believed it, in this part of the world."

"Well, it's comfortable, this, to what it is sometimes. Up Myall Creek, two years ago, I had to camp without a fire, because the Blacks were all round—a bad lot, game to stick a spear into a man any time. That *was* a bitter night! My hair froze on to the brim of my hat, and, when I turned out, the blanket was as stiff as a weather-board. You could stand it on end almost."

He had scarcely spoken, when—

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> "At once there rose so wild a yell,
> As all the fiends from heaven that fell,
> Had pealed the banner-cry of hell!"

"Hee-hee-hee-hee-hee; ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha; yah-yah-yah-yah; hee-hee-hee—ha-ha-ha—ha-ha-yah—yah-yah-yah-yah," kept up without intermission for two minutes. The braying of a donkey could not have been more startling than the yells of maniacal laughter that burst from a branch overhead, where sat a couple of "laughing jackasses" rending the calm morning air with their derisive shouts. Impelled by curiosity, it would seem, a pair of these birds almost invariably visit a camp in the evening and morning, and salute its occupants with a chorus of piercingly shrill laughter, appalling as the ravings of a madman. One never learns to laugh with it, or at it. It strikes upon the ear with a crash, increasing every moment in exasperating intensity, and ends in a prolonged sardonic chuckle, as though in cynical comment on the ways of man.

The overseer took things easily this morning. As there was no serious work to be done, all

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hands had breakfast before looking up the horses. Coiling his stock-whip over his arm, and accompanied by Harold carrying the bridles, he walked off into the Bush to strike their tracks, easily found by the bent grass. In no time the men were soaked up to the waist.

Coming to a wooded ridge, Bill remarked, "They won't go far. Likely they'll be hereabouts. Listen!" And he cracked his whip. Tinkle-tinkle could be heard in the distance. The pack-horse, with the bell on his neck, had turned his head at the familiar sound which roused him from his morning's sleep.

Not far apart stood the three drowsy and dejected animals, their heads hanging down and their bodies drawn in by the cold. With chilled fingers the men forced the bits into their unwilling mouths, removed the hobbles, and led them back to camp.

An hour's ride round the lagoons to look at the cattle and to visit a shepherd's hut, satisfied the overseer that all was going on well on this part of the run. They then got out their guns

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and prepared for sport. Pompey was sent away a distance of half a mile to beat up the patches of scrub, with Grip, who understood the business thoroughly, to help him. Meanwhile, Bill placed Harold in a position where he could command a view all round for a range of forty yards, and instructed him to remain perfectly motionless, taking up his own station out of gun-shot.

They had not long to wait before Grip's yelp announced that game had been moved. Almost immediately afterwards, Harold was astonished at the apparition of a kangaroo, standing not thirty yards in front of him, reared on the extreme tip of its hind toes, to a height not far short of seven feet, its tail forming a tripod support behind, its head turned in the direction of the dog, and its great ears moving nervously. The creature was evidently completely absorbed in listening, and afforded a few moments' opportunity for observing the most singular attitude. A wire cartridge, with No. 4 shot, brought it to the ground stone-dead. Don made a rush, but was

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promptly brought up by the cord, attached to his collar, tied to the stump of a sapling.

Thud, thud, thud! Another kangaroo, but out of sight. Then a wallaby came tripping gracefully along, and was turned over by the left barrel. Harold had just loaded, when Grip yelped furiously in a patch of ferns, and came out driving before him an immense bird, which, on seeing Harold, rose with an astounding clatter, and flew heavily overhead. In his excitement and flurry, he missed with the first barrel, but tumbled it over with the second—a long shot. Releasing Don, he gave chase, and after a smart run the dog dashed up to the wounded bird and held it fast. Harold seized the game by the neck, and, passing his belt-knife through its throat, put an end to its violent struggles. And what a prize! A splendid brush-turkey,* in fine condition, whose weight could not be less than fourteen pounds. As he stood surveying it, Bill came up with Pompey, carrying two wallabies.

* *Tallegalla Lathami*, one of the mound-builders; in no way related to the turkeys.

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"Ah!" he exclaimed, "you're in luck to come across one of those fellows the first day. There are plenty of them about too, but plaguy hard to get at in the open."

Pompey was sent for the pack-horse, which had been left tied to a tree, and the game was soon taken into camp. For security against dingoes, the kangaroo, wallabies, and turkey were hoisted up into a tree, and covered with boughs to hide them from the sharp eyes of any foraging eagle hawk.

"Now for the ducks. We'll stand between the first and second lagoons, and Pompey will drive for us, so that most of the birds will fall on land. It's almost too mean to send the poor old beggar into the water after the cold last night," said the overseer, giving instructions to the native.

Keeping well out of sight among the forest trees, the two men walked a mile beside the water to a place where a narrow creek only connected the lagoons, leaving a hundred yards or so of fern-covered ground between the two sheets of water. Harold crept down to a

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convenient spot, put up his binocular, and scanned the placid surface now glowing in the sunlight. No wonder he had heard such a babel of quacking the night before! Ducks in the middle, ducks at the sides, ducks everywhere—by hundreds and thousands! "How the Lincolnshire punt-gunners' fingers would itch if they could see this," he said to himself.

Here and there very dense patches showed a brood of from six to eight black swans, preening their feathers. Perched on the branches of a sunken tree, not far away, were two snow-white egrets, motionless as though carved in marble; and several blue herons stood at the edge of the reeds, pensively looking down into the water. A scene of such natural beauty, with its wealth of animal life, encompassed by walls of noble timber, in a flood of sunshine at this Australian mid-winter noon—was it not worth a journey from the other side of the world—at least, now that his legs and feet were drier and warmer? No time now, however, for reflections.. A faint, far-distant coo-ee sounded up the lagoon, the water in the middle became

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suddenly churned into glittering spray, and the first cloud of ducks swept towards him, spreading and growing as it came on with lightning speed. Crash went the four barrels almost with one report, sending their leaden hail into the densely packed phalanx of wings. Right and left they swerved, staggered, and fell, while the multitude passed on to a safe retreat in the next lagoon.

"Load up—quick!" said Bill. "Plenty more will be coming yet."

Harold had just put in his second charge and crouched among the ferns, when another flight sped over their heads, and again the guns dealt destruction in its ranks. During the next five minutes hundreds more passed, but, warned by the noise, far out of shot. Now to pick up the spoil. All hands went to work, Pompey and the dogs included. Grip, after his wont, sat down to leisurely munch the first duck he found. Don was soon in full chase after a cripple with a broken wing, which took to the water, but being unable to dive, was easily brought to land. Laid out on a grassy knoll, the "bag"

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looked well—ten ducks and a handsome little teal for one drive!

Leaving Pompey to bring back the game, strung on sticks thrust through the skin of their necks, Harold and the overseer hurried back to the camp to get the lines for a couple of hours' fishing during the best part of the day. Furnished with thirty yards of whipcord each, with a large pike hook at the end, and four or five pounds of raw wallaby meat, they went round to the deep side of the upper lagoon, where the best of the fish lay.

"Put on a good blob of meat, half as big as your fist, heave the line in, and wait. When you feel it tight, give a yard or two more, and then pull baker, pull devil, you run the fish right out on the bank. That's the way to catch the Murray cod. They're that greedy, they'll go for anything, from a grasshopper to a dead bullock."

"Delightfully simple instructions," thought Harold, wondering what the wily fish in England would say to such a primitive attempt to beguile them. However, he cast out his

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line, and very shortly felt a vigorous tug, followed by a strong pull and a wild rush, and his first Murray cod lay struggling on the bank. A beautiful fish it was, bright as a salmon, covered with small scales, and five or six pounds in weight.

So this was the "Murray cod" of which he had heard so much! The head closely resembled that of a perch, while the tail and two fins nearest to it were almost exactly those of a pike, and along the back was stretched a low dorsal fin quite out of character with the others. The capacious mouth was armed with formidable rows of teeth, from which he had some difficulty in extracting the bait and hook.

The fish bit freely, and in less than two hours the catch consisted of seven beauties, the heaviest twelve pounds, and the lightest about three. Bill cut two sticks, shaved them to points at the end, and ran them through the gills, dividing the fish equally between them, and they started for the camp.

"Not so bad, for the time we've been at

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it—eh?" he observed. "They generally run about three to six pounds; but there's some boomers out in the middle, in the deep water. Ten miles below here one of the shepherds caught a thirty-pounder out of the river, on a night-line. My word, that fish *had* a head on him! I saw it, nailed to the hut." Then, in answer to Harold's question whether there were not some fine eels in the lagoons, "Never a one on this side of the Dividing Range. All the cod are on this side, all the eels on the other. That seems strange; but a cod has never been seen on the eastern rivers, where there's lots of fine eels, nor an eel in the western rivers, where you may pull out these fellows till further orders."

Arrived at the camp, he loaded the pack-horse with some of the best fish, two couple of ducks, the tail and the prime parts of the kangaroo, and the brush turkey, and sent Pompey in to the head station, with orders to deliver them to Mrs. MacNab, and come back at once.

The next two hours were occupied with pre-

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parations for supper. The ducks, carefully plucked, and split open, were laid on the hot embers, and the fish on the gridiron, just as they came from the water. Much to Harold's surprise, Bill, after stirring one of the fires into a blaze, laid a wallaby upon it in its skin, and left it there to cook, remarking, "We'll have *that* black-fellow fashion. Wallaby and kangaroo ain't worth much unless you keep the blood in 'em."

At supper time Harold was fain to confess that everything proved excellent. He picked the fish off the bones in rich white flakes, and under the burnt skin of the wallaby found masses of the tenderest and sweetest brown meat, done to perfection.

Pompey sat watching by his own fire the roasting of a wallaby some twelve pounds in weight, on which Bill remarked with a laugh, "What regular bosses these niggers are at a gorge! That old beggar won't leave pickings for a crow on the bones by the morning. He'll be at it now and again all night long."

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The moon rose gloriously, shedding such a light over the lagoons as is never seen in northern latitudes. Some two hours after it was up, the whole party sallied forth into the gum forest on an opossum shooting expedition. Although their calls were to be heard in every direction, Harold would probably never have seen one had not the overseer and Pompey indoctrinated him in the habits of the animals. They come down to the ground at night to feed on young shoots and grasses, and will let a man on horseback ride within a few yards without taking fright, and even a man on foot may approach them pretty closely. But the moment a dog rushes at them they scamper up a large tree and disappear by magic. Grip and Don were very busy. Harold was quite sure he saw one run up a bare trunk and walked quickly round to get a shot. No sign of an opossum there! The smart little fellow was going up spirally, keeping the trunk between himself and the man until he reached a branch, on which he laid himself flat, invisible to the inexperienced eye. Pompey came on the

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scene and carefully examined every branch by getting it as far as possible between his eye and the moon. Then, walking in the opposite direction, he saw that the outline of the object he was watching had slightly altered—the opossum having turned its head gradually to follow the native's movements—and pointed it out to Harold, who brought it down with a charge of No. 6 shot, to Grip's intense delight. The trees assume so many different forms of growth —excrescences, elbows, and broken stumps— that these may be easily mistaken for opossums, and a charge of shot wasted on them, until the sportsman has become familiar with their appearance. Even when badly wounded, the opossum is reluctant to betray his position by any movement, or if killed he may still cling to the tree.

More than once during this nocturnal ramble Harold had seen a shadowy figure skim noiselessly through the moonlight from the branches, and alight on the stem of a neighbouring tree near the ground. Taking a snap shot at one of these, he saw it fall, and ran to pick it up.

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The moment he touched it, he received a savage bite, which made the blood flow freely, but Grip, coming up, gave it a scientific pinch across the loins and settled it. It turned out to be one of the most beautiful of the Australian animals—called by the colonists the "flying squirrel."* The body was about nine inches long, and the tail rather longer. The soft, silky, somewhat woolly and abundant chocolate-brown fur was most pleasant to the touch. Harold examined curiously the thin leathery membrane attached along the sides of the belly and to the wrists and ankles, with which, when extended, it sustains itself in shooting through the air on a downward slope to a distance of thirty or forty yards.

Four opossums and this pretty creature were laid out by the camp fire when they returned, and Pompey was set to work to get the skins off—an operation performed with astonishing celerity. Bill then ordered him to carry away the bodies, and all the refuse of the cooking to some distance from the camp, in order that

* *Petaurus*—a member of the family *Phalangistidæ*.

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the ants might not be attracted and become a nuisance.

Again a bitterly cold night; but Harold managed his blankets better, and, following the overseer's example, kept his boots on. The horses must be brought up in the morning, for, otherwise, they would get into bad habits; besides, there is no knowing when they may be wanted. The same soaking march through the wet grass, then, must be undertaken. They had been following the tracks some time, when tinkle, tinkle—ting, ting, came from afar on the clear morning air.

"There's the bell," exclaimed Harold, walking off in the direction of the sound.

"Ah! many a man's had an hour's tramp after that, and lost his horse," said Bill. "That's the 'bell-bird.' They're all round the lagoons, the little humbugs. And some people think they'll always find water where they hear that. Don't you make any mistake. They never go very far from water, but they 'tinkle, tinkle,' without telling you how to find it."

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The sound certainly had a most remarkable similarity to that of a small horse-bell, needing a practised ear to detect the difference, which is chiefly in the manner of its repetition, rather than in its tone.

Loading up, and leaving Grip with Pompey at the camp, the men shouldered their guns, and went off to a large shallow swamp, with scattered patches of low "ti-tree," a "likely place for snipe," as Bill considered it; and "likely," indeed, Harold found it. The birds rose in wisps of three and five almost every minute, and went away with the familiar "scape, scape," of the English snipe, but somewhat louder and harsher. They were much larger, too, probably few of them under five ounces. Bill made indifferent work of it, but in the course of an hour Harold had eight couple crammed into the game pocket inside his tweed coat. The shooting was pleasantly varied. Bunches of teal feeding in the pools paid toll to his gun. The pretty little spur-winged plover, the Nankeen night-heron, and the black-and-white ibis contributed to the

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goodly array hung on to his belt by pieces of string, for want of a better method of conveyance; and, altogether, he never enjoyed a morning's shooting more thoroughly in his life.

On returning to camp they found the head stockman, who had just ridden up, asking Pompey where he could find the overseer.

"Good day, Joe. What is it?" asked Bill.

The man informed him that while looking for a stray horse at the head of Myall Creek the day before, he had seen a large camp of Blacks not very far from the boundary of the run, and they seemed vicious.

"Saddle up," was the overseer's prompt order. "We'll go over, Joe, this afternoon, and see what the devils are up to."

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CHAPTER VII.

The Blacks—Description of the Camp—A Great Kangaroo Drive—Native Sports—Throwing the Boomerang—The Corroborree.

DURING the ride over to the camp—some eight or nine miles — the overseer chatted with Harold on the subject of the Blacks. Every squatter hates the thought of a black skin on his run. It is almost impossible for the Blacks to refrain from spearing the cattle wholesale, and the temptation to cut off a score of sheep from the flock of some sleepy shepherd is irresistible. What with their numerous camp-fires, their noisy corroborrees, and their hunting expeditions, the disturbance to the cattle is incredible. The mobs will leave their feeding-grounds and stray long distances, giving the stockmen infinite trouble to recover them. Cattle appear, also, to have

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some extraordinary repugnance to the smell of the aboriginals; for they will often become restless, or break into a wild rush when merely crossing the track of a few natives.

All this is a source of great anxiety to the squatter and his men; but it is not the worst. Blacks, if allowed to remain any length of time in one camp, having used up all the game in the neighbourhood, are certain to take to killing sheep, and probably the shepherd as well when he attempts to defend them.

But a few years previously, the Maranoa, Warrego, and Barcoo tribes had been notorious for their hostility to the whites. It was found impracticable to maintain sheep on the country at all, and the cattle left by the retiring settlers became thoroughly wild, took to the scrubs in the broken spurs of the Dividing Range, and turned as savage and dangerous as buffaloes. Many thousands of these spread out westwards, forming large herds, useless for any purpose except as sport for those who cared to risk their lives in the exciting amusement of hunting down and shooting the bulls.

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In the present instance the natives were travelling towards the Expedition Range, for the purpose of attacking a tribe with which they were always at feud; and, as at such times they are disposed to be aggressive, the overseer felt it his duty to give them warning to "move on" out of the neighbourhood of Wallaroo, though they were not actually upon the run.

The camp was formed in a deep, wide gully, near a succession of small water-holes. Riding into the middle of the collection of "gunyahs," the overseer entered into conversation with a white-haired old man, addressing him in the native language.

While the lengthy palaver was going on, Harold had leisure to take note of the singular scene around him. Some hundred or so of bark shelters stood scattered about the gully in no sort of order. Miserable things, about four feet high, formed by two or three sheets of bark resting against stakes lightly inserted in the ground, and inclined towards each other at the upper end. A few bushes and bunches of grass laid over the bark completed the dwelling-

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places of the aboriginal and his family, so small that it would be impossible to lie down at full length in it. In front of each burned a small fire, the smoke from which found its way as often inside the "gunyah" as outside. Here and there, a long, barbed wooden spear leaned against the shelter; some boomerangs and waddies lay about, and numerous conical "dilly-bags," made of closely and neatly plaited rushes and capable of holding water, hung on the lower branches of the trees.

The natives themselves squatted about on the ground, for the most part in the free and easy garb of nature, or here and there one would be partly covered by an opossum rug or the remnants of an old blue blanket, filthy with grease and dirt. On many of the fires lay portions of wallabies and kangaroos, emitting an unpleasant smell of burnt flesh, while in every direction were scattered bones and animal refuse, with a few ragged, mangy dogs, somewhat similar to dingoes, snarling over the garbage. Now and again, from the smoky recess of a "gunyah," a long black arm would

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be protruded to rake the fire together and turn over whatever might be roasting at the moment.

The Blacks took little notice of Harold as he rode slowly about the encampment, except when he came to a group of children, some of whom sauntered up and stared boldly at him, while others peeped furtively from behind the trees, or out of the huts, at the first white man whom probably many of them had ever seen. These children were from four to seven years old, thin-limbed, large-headed, and pot-bellied, totally unlike the well-shaped, robust children of the white races. Harold was astonished at seeing no infants about the place, being then unaware of the habit of the mothers of destroying these burdens when on their long and toilsome journeys. As the majority of the able-bodied men and women and the half-grown boys were away hunting in the Bush, the camp was just now tenanted chiefly by old men and women and children. What men were left in camp were either eating or sleeping.

The behaviour of one family party greatly amused Harold. An elderly man, squatted

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before a fire, was engaged in picking off for himself with a pointed stick the tit-bits from a half-roasted wallaby. Every now and then he would throw a piece of rejected meat or a partially cleaned bone over his shoulder to his two "gins" seated behind him. When they had finished gnawing it, they would toss it away to be scrambled for between the hungry children and the dogs. "If this," thought the spectator, "is the ordinary style of family dinner, no wonder the children looked starved!"

On passing one of the gunyahs, an apparition rose before Harold which remained impressed on his memory for long afterwards. A woman —was it a woman, that living mummy with folds of wrinkled skin hanging on it; its parchment lips drawn back from the toothless mouth; the cavernous orbits, in the front of the hairless skull, enclosing a pair of bleared and shrunken blots, which once were eyes? Slowly the creature advanced, steadying its steps with a long staff grasped by both hands. Harold's horse snorted and started back. Holding out one skeleton claw, the figure cried eagerly several

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times in succession, in the tone of a petulant child "Gib it me, toombaco—gib it me, toombaco." Harold, while handing her a small piece, recollected seeing in an old illustrated edition of "Paradise Lost," a mythical representation of Sin. Here before him stood its loathsome living embodiment—in the person of a sorceress of the Waradgeree tribe!

"They're going to have a kangaroo-drive to-morrow, and a 'corroborree' in the evening. If you like, we'll come over with our guns, and wait to see the big dance," said Bill, riding up. "Now, we'll just go round home by our nearest hut, and see how the sheep are getting on."

The northern part of the run was hilly and wild, and the overseer felt some anxiety as to the safety of a flock so near the Blacks' camp. The shepherd, however, whom they found working his sheep homewards, reported that some of the natives had passed the day before and scared the flock, but that, on counting them out in the morning, the number was found to be right.

For two days previous to this the Blacks had

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been preparing for their drive by surrounding a tract of country in the Myall Hills, intending to bring the game gradually to a point near their camp. Small parties of four or five men and boys, camped out at night at regular intervals in a semicircle, extending, perhaps, two or three miles, sufficed to keep the timid animals together, and during the day they were moved on gently towards the chosen spot—a rough gully, containing patches of thick scrub, where the game could be completely surrounded.

When Harold, the overseer, and Pompey, arrived at the camp the following afternoon, they found it almost deserted. Every man, woman, and child who could crawl half a mile had gone off to help form a cordon round the game and post themselves at the outlet of the gully, to drive the kangaroos back to the beaters.

Bill, knowing the locality well, led on, and giving the horses into Pompey's charge, took up a position where they could command a good view of any game driven out of the scrubs and endeavouring to escape up

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the sides of the gully. Here and there among the brushwood were to be seen the black figures of the natives, men and women alike innocent of a rag of clothing, standing perfectly motionless and silent, spear or waddy in hand, waiting for the signal which would tell them that the game was moving down the gully.

After a few minutes of quiet expectation, a faint humming noise arose in the far distance, varied occasionally by a louder cry, "Hoo-hoo," until it swelled into a volume of sound that filled the air and seemed to come from every quarter at once. Then the first dozen kangaroos bolted from the cover and made towards Harold and Bill. Instantly the natives broke into shouts of "Hoo-hoo," and drove back all that they had not speared. Meanwhile, shouts came loud and frequent from the gully, and kangaroos of all sizes were to be seen rushing about in every direction, and falling to the spears and waddies of the excited Blacks. Harold and the overseer loaded and fired as fast as they could ram the charges down, and gave a good account of all that came within reach. Toddling children

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would throw themselves in the path of a huge bounding kangaroo and fling their throwing sticks at its legs with astonishing precision. The women, screaming with mad delight, struck out right and left, and burst into a chorus of laughter as some successful hit was made. A ponderous "old man" kangaroo, not seeing where he was going in his terror, dashed headlong at Harold, and would have bowled him over like a nine-pin had he not jumped aside in time.

The gully was now a scene of wild confusion and slaughter. Hundreds of kangaroos, hemmed in within a small space, bewildered by meeting their foes wherever they turned, and paralyzed by the frantic yells of the Blacks, almost stood still to be knocked on the head. But the rage for slaughter could not be appeased so long as a single animal remained alive. They scoured the scrubs through and through to make sure that none escaped, while the women, on the outskirts of the brushwood, speared or brained the cripples that were crawling off to the shelter of the ferns.

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From first to last the Blacks had enjoyed an hour of unceasing carnage. Harold was surprised at the great numbers that they had killed, which he estimated, from what he could see in the open places alone, at two hundred, while probably as many more fell in the scrubs.

"That's about all the good the Blacks do," observed Bill. "I reckon a kangaroo, what with the grass he eats, and what he pulls up by the roots, takes as much as two sheep to keep him going. There's no sheep, and no cattle, except scrubbers, on the rough bit of country they've been driving, so they haven't done any harm. But they're off on the tramp northwards to-morrow. I told the old chief I wouldn't have 'em here any longer."

Preparations were now going on at the camp for a mighty feast. The gins collected vast quantities of wood, and made up blazing fires; and the men and boys brought in scores of kangaroos and wallabies, and threw them on the fires in their skins. Meanwhile a party of forty or fifty of the most athletic of the fighting men assembled on an open space to engage in a con-

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test with the boomerang. Each man appeared to have a favourite weapon, with which he challenged all comers to try their skill against his. Harold carefully examined some of these singular weapons, which their owners handed him for inspection with an air of conscious pride. A line of spears having been laid on the ground as a boundary, the thrower took a few paces backwards, grasping his boomerang quite at one end in his right hand. He then advanced, raising his arm, with the elbow bent, above his head, and the convex edge of the weapon downwards. By a rapid circular movement of the arm from left to right the boomerang was sent on its course, with the concave edge in the direction of the line of flight at the moment of delivery. So swift was the flight, that the eye could scarcely follow the shadowy form of the weapon until it reached its culminating point, some seventy or eighty yards away, and perhaps twenty yards above the earth, when it was seen to flutter and hang an instant in the air, and then come spinning back to the thrower, falling within a few yards of

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him, or, in some cases, behind him. This is the manner of throwing at flying ducks or other birds, the object being to make the boomerang return as near as possible to the thrower, in the event of its missing its mark. The most expert of the men managed to get it within half a dozen paces of the starting-point, scoring accordingly; but there was much laughter, ducking of heads, and dodging, when one of the missiles, by its erratic course in returning, threatened to strike any of the competitors.

For fighting purposes the weapon was used very differently. The thrower ran rapidly forward a few steps, delivering it at about the level of the hip, and making it strike the ground on one of its horns ten or twelve yards from him. It then ricochetted and flew straight away fifty or sixty yards, keeping a horizontal line three or four feet from the earth, gradually rising until it was spent, and falling without returning. The ground must be fairly level and unencumbered by long grass or bushes to admit of throwing it in this manner.

The shields used by the natives were made of

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an extremely light kind of wood, such as hibiscus, some two feet long, a foot wide, and four inches thick, with a small piece scooped out at the back, leaving a bar of the wood to be held by the fingers. A stalwart warrior, taking one of these in his hand, placed himself as a target at a distance of thirty paces from the boundary, and challenged the others to hit him. The naked black figure stood watching his assailants throwing one at a time in rapid succession; now avoiding a hit by a slight movement of his body, and again catching the missiles full on the shield. It seemed impossible to strike him, so keen was his eye and so quick his movements, though protected only by that insignificant piece of wood. The fellow must have possessed splendid nerve, for a blow from one of the boomerangs would have killed him or inflicted a terrible wound.

While the sports of the men were going on, the children, both boys and girls, armed with small strips of bark for shields, short pieces of hard wood for weapons, and pointed sticks for spears, engaged in a mimic war.

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These little naked imps darted in and out after one another among the trees, throwing their weapons with determination and wonderfully exact aim; warding off the blows with equal skill or slipping behind a tree out of the way of a missile. Children as they were, there was no flinching from the contest. The party which proved to be the strongest at length drove the enemy from tree to tree, through a grove of she-oaks, across an open space—many a hard knock being given, and many a flying stick cleverly stopped by the strip of bark, right into the middle of the camp, where hostilities ceased. Thus the children of the aborigines systematically train themselves, often under the direction of their elders, for the savage warfare in which it is their ambition to distinguish themselves.

The huge fires, meanwhile, raged furiously under the blackened and shrivelled bodies of the kangaroos, and the air reeked with the stench of frizzled flesh. Dragging a carcase from the fire, half a dozen blacks would squat themselves round it, tear off the partially

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cooked meat with short, pointed sticks, and devour it as ravenously as wild beasts. Their faces, smeared with grease and blood from the almost raw entrails, presented a sickening appearance. Behind each little group of men squatted the gins and children, to whom the lords of creation flung whatever they thought not good enough for themselves, and the miserable looking dogs scrambled for the refuse.

By way of doing honour to the white men, the old chief spread a fine opossum rug on the ground beside his fire, planted a spear upright at one corner of it, as a sign of possession, and invited the overseer and Harold to seat themselves—Pompey sitting on the ground at a respectful distance. The wild Blacks stared hard at this outcast from their race, who would have been promptly despatched had he ventured into the camp alone. Pompey tied up the horses to a neighbouring tree, and now set to work to gorge himself like the rest, while the white men preferred munching a piece of cold boiled salt beef and damper, which they had brought in their saddle-pouches.

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The overseer handed a plug of tobacco to the chief, who produced an exceedingly dirty, strong clay pipe from a dilly-bag brought by one of his gins, nipped off some pieces of tobacco with his fine white front teeth, rubbed them carefully between his palms, crammed them into the bowl, and lighted up with the point of a glowing stick, which he kept almost constantly applied to the pipe.

The figure of the old savage was not wanting in a certain impressiveness and dignity. His mop of crisp white hair fell on his black, polished shoulders; and his still blacker and wrinkled face was surrounded by a bushy grey beard. Firm, well-developed muscles stood out on his chest and back, both of which were thickly clothed with matted hair—a peculiarity not uncommon among old aboriginals. His arms were good as far as the long ugly hands, and the almost calfless legs ended in large flat feet, whose toes he used as fingers. Whenever his fire-stick burned dull, he seized it with his foot, thrust out his leg, held the stick in the blaze for a few moments, and transferred the light to

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his hand. This habit of using the feet as hands Harold had noticed in many of the Blacks during the day. They picked up their spears with the greatest ease, never taking the trouble to stoop for any object small enough to be grasped by the toes.

After a long contemplative smoke, the chief stood up and addressed some words to the men round the nearest fires.

"Now they're going to begin their "corroborree," as they call it," said the overseer. "It's a queer sight. I can't see what fun there is in it; but they'll go on prancing round here till the middle of the night, p'r'aps to shake their full bellies down a bit, and then go at the grub again as hard as ever."

The short twilight was fast deepening into night, and already the great stars of the Southern Cross twinkled over the Myall Hills. Gradually all the grown men withdrew themselves into the surrounding Bush. The women collected small heaps of dry leaves and grass near each of the half-dozen fires which formed a semicircle in front of the chief's position.

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In strange contrast to the clamour that had been going on shortly before, silence fell on the whole camp. About thirty of the women arranged themselves in two rows, squatted on the ground before the fires, some with opossum rugs over their knees, others with a shield and boomerang, or two boomerangs in their hands; their black hair decorated with tufts of down of the white cockatoo, by way of both ornament and dress. For some considerable time they remained thus motionless in expectation, their eyes eagerly fixed on the darkness beyond the dull glow of the sinking fires. Not a leaf rustled in the calm cool air. One would have thought it impossible that any living thing could have been in that silent forest.

Pur-r-r-r-r-r-r-r, ee, faintly in the distance.

"Now they're coming," whispered Bill. Then nearer and nearer, Pur-r-r-r-r—Purrrrrrr,ee—Pur-r-r-r—Pur-r-r-r,ee. The fires leaped as by magic into a bright blaze, and fifty naked men dashed forward out of the darkness into the lurid glare. A deep, long-drawn sigh of admiration or wonder burst simultaneously from

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all the women—"Ah-h-h-h!—Ah-h-h!"—and the warriors stood motionless for some seconds.

A remarkable sight they presented. Long lines were marked with some kind of white clay down the front of their legs and arms; transverse bars were drawn across their chests, following the lines of the ribs, and broad white circles surrounded their eyes—all in rough imitation of the human skeleton. White feathers were stuck in their hair, and their bodies shone with grease. A moment's pause, and the women, with one accord, struck up a low, monotonous chant, beating time with the boomerangs and shields, and drumming on the skins stretched over their legs. To this primitive, but not unpleasant music, the men began a slow march, some dozen paces to the right, in single file, then turned round and retraced their steps with the most perfect regularity in every movement, while they held their weapons over their heads, with their arms bent, and clashed the boomerangs together at short intervals. Presently the marching was varied by a succession of rapid leaps to the right and left alternately,

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accompanied by quicker music. Then, in an instant, all the white lines disappeared, as the men turned quickly on their heels, with their backs to the fires, and reappeared when they again presented their fronts to the light. The effect of the skeleton forms, now vanishing and now flashing into sight, the whole line turning as one man, was most striking. At every turn the music ceased for a moment, and the women uttered their emphatic note of admiration, "Ah, ah!" At some unseen signal, a few bunches of grass were thrown on the fires, and when the temporary darkness had given place to a fresh blaze, the dancers had vanished into the gloom of the forest. This concluded scene the first of some dramatic representation, unintelligible to the visitors, but watched throughout every phase with the strictest attention and interest by the Blacks.

Once more the women struck up their chant, and the dancers leaped forward into the glare. With their hands held hanging at the level of their chests, their legs wide apart, rigid, and bent at the knees, they assumed a stooping

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posture, and sprang backwards, forwards, and sideways, stamping their feet vigorously, and looking first over one shoulder, then over the other, in evident imitation of kangaroos. They changed the figure rapidly by extending the right arm in a curve over the head, with the hand open, walked slowly and stiffly in single file, stooping at regular intervals to bring the hand near the ground, in the manner of an emu feeding, and ran round in circles, throwing out their legs in an awkward fashion, suggestive of the long, shambling gait of the bird when pursued.

This hunting scene over, one of a more serious character followed. The hitherto melodious chant became a wild exultant chorus, stimulating the warriors to doughty deeds. They made the most singularly rapid evolutions, rushing upon each other in two opposing lines, with frantic gestures and faces distorted by passion, striking out with their spears, swinging their heavy "nullah-nullahs" * round their heads, clashing their "yeelemans" † together

* War-clubs. † Shields.

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and going through all the various passages of attack and defence in warfare. Although at the culminating point of this performance, arms and legs, heads and bodies whirled about in what appeared to the spectators a *mêlée* of disjointed limbs of men and flashing weapons, the whole party were really moving in perfect unison, each individual of the collective human automaton playing his part with a regularity and precision which rendered the dance free from all confusion or danger.

"Well, have you had enough of it?" asked the overseer, as the performers again retired into the background for a brief rest after their violent exertions and excitement of the last hour. "We've seen the whole fakement now; but they'll go through it again all night long."

Harold admitted that he had watched the display almost with fascination, but if there was to be no variation on what he had seen, they might as well be moving. He made the old chief a present of his belt-knife and sheath, which he could easily get replaced at the store, to the great satisfaction of the grizzly savage,

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who patted him on the chest in token of friendship, and grinned with delight. The overseer passed a few complimentary remarks on the excellence of the "corroborree," and renewed his injunctions to the chief to see that the people moved off on the following day. The visitors then mounted their horses, and the camp was soon left far behind, though at intervals they could hear in the distance the cadences of the wild song with which the women were still urging on the interminable dance.

"What was there to prevent those fellows from knocking us on the head as we sat there, if they had a mind?" asked Harold.

"Well, I dare say they didn't much like the look of the guns, and that revolver in your belt," answered Humphreys. "But they know better than that. With stations all round here, they'd get it hot before they could clear out. Besides, two years ago, some of this tribe killed a bullock-driver lower down on the Maranoa, and the native police came and hunted them down pretty well. That old nigger that bosses the camp over there knows all about that

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business. No—it isn't good enough. The black fellow likes to catch a man asleep on a hot day out with his flock, or stooping down to drink at a creek when he's not able to make a fight of it. But they do dread shooting-irons, and no mistake. The best plan is never to let a black fellow, unless it's a tame old cuss like Pompey, get any sort of chance at you. Some of 'em can't resist the temptation of knocking a man on the head, just for the sake of his knife and the bit of bacca he's got in his pocket. Any one of the lot over there would do it if he thought he was safe.

"They seem to make a very important business of the 'corroborree,'" observed Harold. "Where do they get that white material for painting themselves?"

"Oh, that pipe-clay stuff! There's some in the cliffs on the Warrego. They fetch it from there, and the gins carry it about for hundreds of miles in their 'dilly-bags.' If you took a peep into one of the bags, you'd see all sorts of rubbish—lumps of this clay, cockatoos' down, and feathers for making themselves smart at

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the corroborrees; bundles of kangaroos' sinews for sewing the 'possum rugs, an old pipe or two, and very likely a few teeth or little bones belonging to some black fellow that had gone 'bong,' as they call it. They're just like a lot of children; and blow me if I can see what use they are!"

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CHAPTER VIII.

Work in the Stock-yard—Drafting Cattle—Punishing the Rowdy Ones—A Narrow Escape from an Infuriated Cow—Running-in a Mob of Horses—"Breaking-in" a Colt—"Tailing" the "Weaners"—Fencing—A Find of Wild Honey—A Litter of Dingoes—The Bush on Fire.

UNTIL the lambing season, in a month's time, there would be little work on hand, except the usual routine of visiting the shepherds, killing for the store, putting a new rail in the paddock fence here and there, mending a sheep-yard, patching the roof of a hut, or some other of the numerous odds and ends that give constant employment to the hands on a station between the three great events of the year, viz., lambing, shearing, and the general muster for branding and marking the cattle. The overseer therefore decided to devote the next week to hunting up some of the smaller mobs of quiet cattle and

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branding the calves. Accordingly, he set off early on a fine morning, with Joe, the head stockman, Harold, and Pompey, to gather up the cattle on the flats across Myall Creek, leaving a couple of men to see that all the gates and rails of the stock-yard worked properly. By midday they had collected some three hundred beasts, including a large number of cows and calves, and had them quietly settled in the big yard, and, after a hasty bite, went to work to draft out the different classes. The steers and the cows and the already branded stock were to be turned loose, while all unbranded calves and those to be weaned were to be retained.

In the middle of the receiving yard were four strong round posts of solid timber, about two feet in diameter and five feet high, sunk deep into the ground, as a refuge from a charging beast, and so arranged that a man could slip between them from any direction, and get away on the other side. This being Harold's first experience in a yard with cattle, the overseer recommended him to keep within reach of the refuge and watch the process of

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drafting, giving him also a stout sapling, some four feet long, with instructions to "lay it on thick" if a beast threatened to turn on him. Joe carried a similar weapon, and the overseer trusted to his heavy stock-whip for protection. These men went in among the surging mass of cattle with the utmost coolness, moving them round the yard until they came to the drafting-yards, where the men stationed at the gates admitted the cows and young stock, shutting them smartly in the faces of those which they did not want.

As the work proceeded, the animals became greatly excited. The overseer stood quietly giving his orders to the men stationed at the gates, his practised eye taking in the behaviour of every one of the rushing crowd. At the first sign of a threat from a beast to break out of the moving circle, the lash of his whip fell on its face with the force of a pistol-shot, and sent it bleeding into the ruck. His skill in dealing the blow wherever he chose was marvellous to Harold. The terrible fifteen feet thong would be kept whirling in the air with-

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out touching the ground, until some rowdy animal required it, when it was launched out to inflict a cut on some tender spot, which instantly showed the severity of the stroke by a streak of blood. "Schooling 'em a bit," as he remarked to Harold, "they're bound to know what the crack of a whip means after they've once felt it. These youngsters will remember it for the next twelve months when they get rowdy."

An unbranded steer, some fifteen months old, which had proved extremely troublesome, in spite of more than one "lesson," broke from the ruck, and went at Joe like a flash of lightning. But the stockman was not to be caught. He stepped aside cleverly, bringing his stick down on the back of the beast's neck as it passed, and dropped it staggering to its knees. "Now's the chance, Jimmy," he shouted to one of the men, "open the crush lane;" and, before the dazed animal knew where it was, a couple more blows urged it into the narrow space between two fences, with no opening in front, no room to turn, and a gate fast shut

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behind it, where it would remain to be branded.

Many of the cows were now separated from their calves, and, taking it much to heart, became furious. The men were every now and then clambering up the fences out of the way of some bereaved mother intent on avenging herself, greatly to the amusement of those who did not happen for the moment to be in danger of being impaled. As yet Harold had fared pretty well. A stately old bull trotted up to him once with a flourish of his head, but turned away with dignified contempt. When, however, the overseer let down the slip-rails to pass out some forty or fifty cows and steers, and the stream came rushing down the yard to the opening, an infuriated cow made for him with murderous intent. "Look out!" cried Joe. Not a moment too soon, Harold turned, and slipped between the massive posts. The beast, blind with fury, crashed against the timber, fell back on her haunches, and reeled out of the yard dizzy with the force of the collision.

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It was nearly dark before the drafting was completed, the unbranded animals and "weaners" secured in the smaller yards, and the cows and all others that were not wanted sent into the Bush.

During the whole night the bereaved cows paraded up and down near the yard, bellowing their distressful complaints to the imprisoned calves, who kept up an unceasing chorus of replies until the men appeared early in the morning to begin the branding.

A big fire was lighted near one corner of the yard, and the irons made red-hot. It was an easy matter to deal with the younger animals. One man caught the calf by the head, another by the tail, and held it fast against the fence, while the brand was pressed firmly on its flank by a third, until the hair was singed off and the roots destroyed; some little skill being necessary in performing the operation, for if the skin is too deeply burned it becomes drawn together by the scars, and the surrounding hair grows across it from all directions, concealing the mark. The larger

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and older animals had to be secured with green-hide ropes, and often gave a great deal of trouble before they were entitled to carry away the station brand, $\frac{\text{Mc}}{\text{N}}$, in evidence of MacNab's ownership. Harold worked all day with a will, and was not loth to see the last of the young calves sent out, to find their afflicted mothers waiting for them, and the last batch of "weaners" turned into the paddock by themselves to forget the taste of milk.

Three days of this, a fresh batch being brought in every day, resulted in the addition of a herd of some two hundred steers and heifers to the marked stock of Wallaroo.

There were still, however, some colts to be looked up among the rough ridges to the north of the run.

Joe informed the overseer that a nice mob of mares, with young foals beside them, ran on a grass-tree flat near his hut up Myall Creek, and these it was decided to bring in.

As some hard galloping was to be expected, Harold saddled Boxer, and the overseer selected

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one of his favourite mounts, a steady but fast animal, the stockman accompanying them to the ground.

Three miles above the head station, the creek made a large loop, which enclosed about a thousand acres of rich pasture. Here they found the mob soon after sunrise, grazing quietly, and little suspecting the worry that was in store for them.

Pulling up just within cover of the forest, the overseer cracked his whip. Every head was suddenly raised and turned in the direction of the sound. A fine stallion trotted out a hundred yards from the mob, pawed the earth, shook his long mane, snorted defiance, and cantered back. It was a pretty sight indeed, this untamed stallion, whose mouth had never champed a bit, nor his back known the touch of a saddle, careering round his charges, with head erect and tail carried high. How proudly and gracefully he bore himself, while rounding up the scattered mob, with the intention of taking them back to the ridges and scrubs out of reach of the threatened danger!

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But to no purpose. The three horsemen dashed down upon the flat, and effectually cut him off from the high ground. In a few seconds the whole mob were heading towards the station at a great pace, with the stock-whips cracking at their tails. The stallion still kept doing his utmost to urge the mob away from the level ground, but the skill of the stock-horses anticipated every movement.

Before reaching the station it was necessary to take them across some heavily timbered sandstone ridges, encumbered with much dead wood and long, coarse grass. Harold had often wondered at the agility of cattle going over rough country; but these horses, many of them quite young colts running with their dams, flew over every obstacle and between the closely packed timber at racing speed, making nothing of impediments which would soon have brought an English hunter to grief.

Boxer was in his glory. He enjoyed the subjugation of his own species. The rider, meanwhile, had as much work as he could manage in keeping his legs from being knocked

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against the trees, and his head from coming into violent collision with overhanging branches, for the horse had it all his own way throughout, refusing to yield obedience to any direction from the bridle when it differed from his judgment in a matter he so well understood.

Harold came to the conclusion, on dismounting at the stock-yard, that a clever Bush horse might be trusted to impart some useful information to an inexperienced "new chum."

Some sixty horses of all ages were now enclosed in the yard.

"Let 'em stay quiet and get over the flurry," said the overseer. "I say, Joe, isn't that long mare with the little foal the one we lost last winter when we were taking that mob of fat bullocks down to Roma for sale? Sure it is. Look! there's the Y.G. brand on her shoulder, and ours on the flank. Well, well; who'd have thought she'd have found her way back to the old run?"

"Some nice, likely looking colts in that lot—a score or so, I should say," remarked the stockman. "There's a fine, upstanding youngster—

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the dark grey—just about the age to tackle; rising three years old. I reckon you won't let *him* go till he's been backed."

The drafting, branding, and cutting of the horses proved a much easier task than dealing with the cattle. The colts were turned out with their dams in the afternoon, the overseer deciding to postpone the breaking-in of the best of them until after the lambing was over, with the exception of the dark grey gelding, which was left in the pound for immediate treatment.

And a noble animal he was; his eye full of fire, his limbs straight, clean, and unblemished, his fetlocks supple, and all his movements as graceful as those of a fawn. He was gently driven into the crush-lane, and fixed up with the slip-bars, so that he could go neither backward nor forward, nor injure himself by plunging.

Bill sent Joe for the surcingle and breaking-bit, and placed himself close to the fence at one side of the colt, directing Harold to do the same on the opposite side, and began stroking the

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animal's back and sides with a loop of his stock-whip.

"I want him to see that we are not going to hurt him," he said. "The longer you are breaking a youngster in, and the more you handle him, the better he'll turn out. It's time saved in the end."

It was long, however, before the frightened animal ceased to shiver and snort at every touch, and roll his bright eye towards the two men, who filled his heart with terror by their presence. At the end of half an hour the surcingle was buckled round him, the breaking-bit fixed in his mouth, the bearing-reins fastened, a green-hide leading-rein twenty feet long attached to the bit, and the colt let out into the yard. Then, thinking himself free, he bolted forward, kicking and plunging, but was soon brought up by a violent jerk from the rein, which one of his hind-feet had trodden on as it trailed between his legs.

"You're learning your A, B, C, now, my boy," observed Bill, laconically, as he filled his pipe and watched the astonished animal rearing to

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try and shake off the trammels. "You won't break any of *that* gear this side of Christmas."

The colt struggled desperately with his difficulties, now racing round the yard until he was pulled up by the trailing-rein, then standing still and straining with all his might to break the bearing-reins. When the colt had begun to find that the only way of escaping the severe jerk of the long rein was to stand still the moment he felt it, Bill knocked the ashes out of his pipe, dexterously caught the end of the rein off the ground, and brought him up standing by a sharp pull—the first step in associating the idea of control with the action of the man. This set the animal galloping in circles at the end of the rein, and for some minutes the overseer found himself dragged about all over the yard. Now, twisting the end of the rein securely round his left arm, he flicked the colt smartly on the hind-quarters with his stock-whip. Another surprise for the animal, which faced the overseer momentarily, to escape the unknown source of irritation behind. After a long and patient course of

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these tactics, the colt would swing round in his gallop at the touch of the whip, and show a disposition to come towards the man. Whenever this occurred, the breaker took in the slack of the rein and got nearer to the horse, which was compelled by the force of circumstances to direct all its attention on the movements of the strange being who was so mysteriously but surely gaining control over its will. Its mouth, too, was beginning to feel sore, and, even in the course of a short hour, experience had shown it the advantage of slackening the rein of its own accord whenever the bit was jerked. "Stand up," cried the overseer, at each touch of the whip, as the animal turned towards him and halted. By repeating these manœuvres over and over again, the man at length succeeded in gathering up the rein until he stood within touching distance of the horse, which seemed fascinated by his steady gaze, and extended its head with widely spread nostrils to sniff the hand that held the rein. Any sudden motion on the part of the overseer would have upset the highly strung nervous

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system of the gelding, and sent him flying to the end of the tether. Harold watched the scene with bated breath. Advancing by inches, the man slowly stretched out his hand until it rested firmly on the colt's neck, and gradually passed down to its shoulder. Then he began speaking in a low coaxing voice, still working his hand over neck, wither, and side, until he reached the buckle of the surcingle, which he slipped without creating any alarm. The bearing reins were then cautiously loosened, the bit withdrawn, and the captive freed before he knew what had happened. Contrary to Harold's expectation, the gelding moved quietly away, and when the overseer let down the slip-rails, trotted off into the paddock, neighing for the companions which he would only meet again in the character of a broken-in stock-horse.

"He ought to turn out a spanker," observed Bill, "and he'll be a big horse, too, when he's done growing. I shouldn't wonder if we got the saddle on him to-morrow or next day. He's had enough of it for one time, and pretty

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well tired out, I dare say. I never like to give a youngster more than three hours' schooling the first time."

"I wonder he didn't try to cut you down with his fore-feet, when you brought him up close with the rein," said Harold.

"Ah, it does seem strange; but it's only the old hands get up to that beastly trick, when they've been badly knocked about."

Next morning, Harold and the overseer rode round the paddock to bring in the colt, which they found feeding with the working horses. But he made one more effort for freedom when nearing the yard, by going straight at the paddock fence, which he would certainly have cleared, had not Boxer, who knew perfectly well that this was a likely thing for the youngster to do, cut him off in the nick of time, just grazing Harold's toe against the fence. Once in the yard, he felt the influence of yesterday's training, and went quietly into the crush-lane, where the men had the tackle on him in a few minutes. The same process was then gone through for an hour, with ever-

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increasing success, until the colt faced his trainer, and walked towards him at the word of command, "Stand up," allowing himself, besides, to be handled and rubbed all over his head, neck, back, and fore-legs. The overseer now had his saddle brought and laid on the ground in the yard, leading the colt round it, and encouraging him to come nearer and smell the strange object. Lifting the saddle cautiously, and first touching the animal with it several times, "to show him it would not bite him," as he said, Bill succeeded in placing it on the colt's back and taking a walk round the yard with his pupil, who, though he showed much nervousness, and humped his back now and then, made no effort to buck or get rid of the unaccustomed burden. Slowly they paraded the yard for the best part of an hour, while the overseer frequently stopped, rested his arm heavily over the saddle, buckled and unbuckled the girths, pulled at the stirrups, and did everything to render the colt familiar with this part of the equipment. By the end of the lesson, such good progress had been

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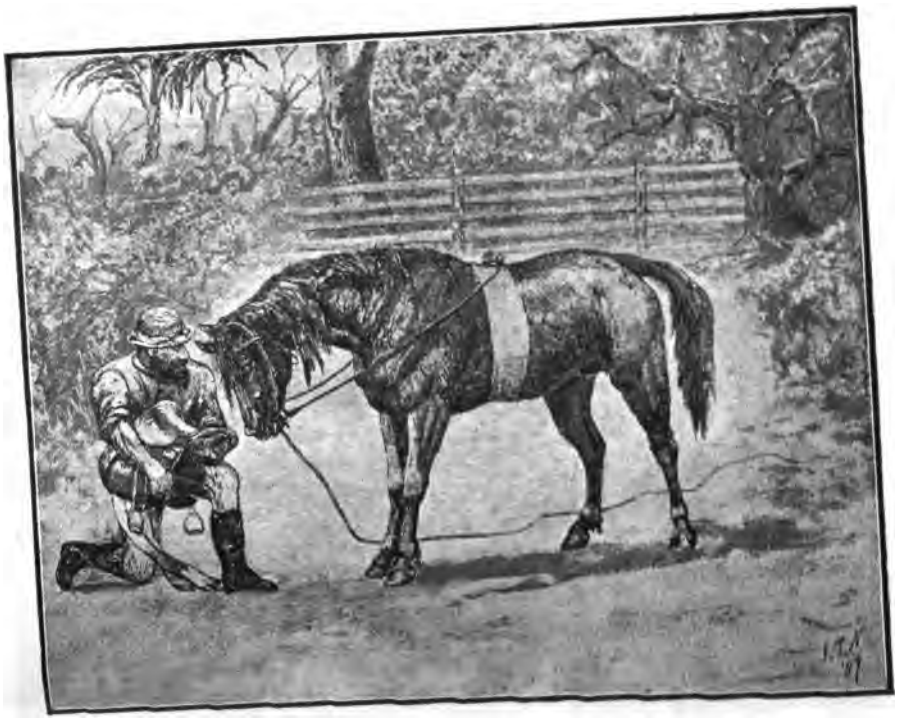

"MAKING FRIENDS." [Vol. I. p. 229.

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made that the overseer thought he might soon venture to get on the horse, without risking any loss of the confidence that had become established between them, though, if he could have spared the time, he would have preferred spending a week on the repetition of these preliminary instructions.

"It seems a long job, this," he remarked to Harold; "but it pays. One of those regular horse-breaker chaps would have been on his back the first day, just to get through with it anyhow and collar his money; and a nice turn-out it would have been—a good colt ruined, no sort of mouth to him (unless it was all on one side), a nasty, vicious, bucking devil, like Bendigo—ah, we'll have *him* in one of these days, if you'd like to try a tip-top buck-jumper."

No man in the whole colony would have been readier to mount the colt half-an-hour after it had been yarded, for Bill had gained a reputation for sitting "anything with hair on it;" but he knew that the system knocked all the pluck out of timid horses, and turned the spirited ones into savages, which fought

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throughout their whole lives against the dominion of man.

After another morning's steady work at teaching the colt to lead by the bridle, to drive in long reins, with the trainer walking behind and keeping him up to the bit, in order so teach the meaning of a pull on one side or other of the mouth, it was decided to "back" him for the first time. Harold had taken part in the exercises of the last two days, so that the pupil might become accustomed to more than one master, and a quiet old horse had been walked about the yard in his company, to increase the colt's confidence.

Accoutred in an ordinary saddle and a bridle with snaffle bit, the handsome gelding now stood ready to be mounted. Every movement of the overseer was made with, if possible, redoubled caution. Keeping the colt's head steady with the reins, he placed his foot in the stirrup-iron, and lightly crossed its back. Feeling the unaccustomed weight, the animal stood still a moment, overcome by surprise, then lurched forward, and almost came to its

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knees, recovered itself, kicked out viciously, turned round a few times, and finally refused to move a step. Harold, obeying the overseer's instructions, then unhitched the quiet horse from the fence, and rode up beside the gelding, which at once started off at a walk by the side of its companion. Little by little the colt's paces improved. The rider managed to get it to move independently of the companion horse now and then, while keeping full command of its head, and meeting with patient determination every attempt to escape from control. Though the overseer sat as firm as a rock, prepared for any sudden outburst of bucking, the colt merely humped its back from time to time, and showed evident difficulty in keeping its balance under the unaccustomed burden, swerving awkwardly, and crossing its legs when turned in different directions by the bridle.

Looking on at this interesting spectacle—a mettlesome horse gradually coming into subjection to superior will, intelligence, and patience—Harold's mind reverted to many a

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story he had read of the wonderful feats attributed to Mexican riders and horses. The lassoing of the "fiery wild steed of the Pampas," the mounting it there and then, the galloping away furiously for miles over illimitable plains, and the bringing it back exhausted and bloody, but "completely subdued," to be thenceforth the obedient servant of man! All very picturesque, he thought, this style of description, but vastly different from the reality as he had seen horse-breaking practised here by an experienced hand on this powerful Australian colt. Had the off-hand method, so graphically described by the pen of the imaginative novelist, been adopted here, the result would assuredly have been disastrous either to the horse or the rider—possibly to both. The conviction was forced on Harold that a horse cannot carry a man, or keep its legs with any certainty, until it has been *taught* to balance his weight, and accustom its paces to the burden. When the overseer dismounted and stripped the colt, the exertion it had undergone during the past hour showed plainly in the lather of sweat

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under the saddle-flaps, and the patches of foam from the bit sprinkled all over the fore-quarters.

Every day throughout the next week the overseer managed to spare an hour for the training of the colt, determining to let no one else touch so promising an animal until it was thoroughly mastered.

The grass in the paddock being now none too plentiful for the stock-horses, Harold was given the job of "tailing" between fifty and sixty "weaners" out on the run, his duty being to bring them back to the paddock in the evening. These calves had by this time begun to be reconciled to the loss of their mothers' milk; while the latter had gone back to their respective mobs, to forget both the worry of the stock-yard and the very existence of the young for which they had recently expressed so much concern.

During his stay on Wallaroo, Harold had never been assigned so irksome a duty as that of looking after these refractory beasts. From early morning till late at night it was a perpetual task riding round the straggling herd

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and keeping them together. If his attention slackened for a minute, a dozen of the stupid creatures would wander off in as many different directions, or the whole mob would take fright for some inexplicable reason, and gallop madly off through the heaviest of the timber, and suddenly pull up and stare at the horseman as if they had never seen such a thing as a mounted man in their lives before. One week of this proved quite enough to render him familiar with all that could be learned of the vagaries of weaners, and he was glad enough when the overseer sent Pompey to take charge of them and release him for more congenial work.

MacNab had found it necessary to add a slip more land to the paddock by a new fence half a mile long, enclosing a well-grassed flat as pasture for the fat cattle he intended to muster for market next year. Two steady and experienced Bush-carpenters, the brothers Simpson, arrived at Wallaroo with their horse-dray and tools, and entered into a contract to fell the timber and put up a three-rail fence at so much the rod. Harold was to camp out and work

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with them, and learn as much as he could before the lambing season, the men being only too willing to have the help of a strong, handy young fellow who would cost them nothing in wages or rations.

The three men spent the first day in making their camp on the banks of a bright rivulet. The horse-dray, with a tarpaulin spread over it, made a good shelter. The two quiet nags belonging to the Simpsons were turned into the paddock until they should be wanted, and, early the next morning, all hands sallied out into the Bush to choose the best trees for their purpose. One chip taken out of the bark with an axe and an examination of the run of the grain sufficed to doom the tree to be turned into posts and rails, or let it stand as a "duffer," too much twisted to split truly. The judgment of these men was so accurate, that a glance up the trunk and at the direction of the branches usually settled the matter at once. Then the long, heavy cross-cut saw was set to work, and three or four hours' steady labour felled the growth of a century to the earth. The prostrate tree

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was cut into the required lengths, and these finally split up by means of wedges, the posts morticed, and all laid in order along the line of the intended fence.

Every day, from sunrise to sunset, in the calm, cool, rainless, winter weather, did the men pursue their laborious occupation, earning such nights of complete rest as only Bushmen enjoy. On moonlight nights, when they worked, they would take a "spell" for a couple of hours at midday, and again go to work by the soft silvery light until the small hours of the morning—Harold taking his full share of the labour, and listening with pleasure to the sharp "tang" of the axe and the "swish, swish," of the great double-handed saw ploughing its way through the body of some sturdy forest giant.

Pompey was in the habit of coming round every two or three days to see whether the Simpsons needed anything from the store; for these hard-working fellows denied themselves no luxury while they were on a paying job. One dinner-time, the old black hurried up to the camp in a state of excitement, and announced—

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"Me find him one cabawn budgeree sugar-bag * tree, alongee creek."

The men jumped up from their half-eaten dinner, and, shouldering saws and axes, started off on Pompey's lead to secure the prize. The "sugar-bag" proved to be in a large dead iron-bark tree, which, to the inexperienced eye, betrayed no signs of being inhabited by bees. On close examination, however, a thin stream of small reddish ants could be seen crawling up one side of the trunk, while a similar stream was descending on the other. These had been the black fellow's honey-guides, certain indicators of the presence of the sweet store which the army of tiny robbers was carrying away to some distant nest. A few blows with an axe on the trunk proved the tree to be hollow for a great part of its length. The Simpsons made short work of cutting half a dozen holes into it all round, and a large fire was lighted against the trunk to burn it down. Nothing but a shell of wood being left, the fire made rapid progress. Now and then a few bees,

* Wild honey.

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disturbed from their winter slumber, flew drowsily round, or fell stupefied on the earth. These Harold easily recognized as the common European bee, not the small harmless native insect; and the Simpsons were for clearing out rather than run the risk of being stung to death by the infuriated colony. But Harold assured them that he had often taken part in smoking out honey-bees at home, and, with the strong body of fire and smoke about the tree now, there was no danger of an attack.

Pompey created no little amusement by picking up one of the bees between his finger and thumb, and immediately dancing round, shaking his hand violently, and spluttering out the whole vocabulary of native anathemas. With a woeful expression of face he examined the injured finger, declaring emphatically, "Me b'leeve that one dam feller fire-stick." *

Presently the tree, burnt through all round at the level of the earth, fell with a crash, amidst a cloud of smoke and sparks, and revealed an astonishing sight. For a distance of

* Red-hot ember.

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ten feet the bees had completely filled the rotten trunk with a mass of comb, three feet in diameter, whose weight in falling broke open the decayed wood in several places. The honey flowed out on the ground, smothering the bees in thousands.

What a wealth of garnered gain from the flowers of eucalyptus and wattle was there, wasting itself on the earth! How many years had the busy insects spent in gathering this store, of perhaps a ton weight of food, which they could not by any possibility consume? The greater part of the combs were dark with age, while the harvest of the last season could easily be identified by the delicate white cells pouring out their golden stream, dotted with the bodies of drowning bees.

Pompey was sent off to the carpenters' camp for the galvanized iron bucket in which they boiled their beef, and it was soon filled with the best of the unbroken combs, and carried back to camp. The men at the station, hearing of the find from Pompey, who first took care to eat as much as he could stow away, hurried off

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to the spot and filled up all the spare tins and dishes they possessed with the welcome luxury.

The Simpsons enjoyed the honey immensely; but Harold was fain to confess that it tasted far inferior to that gathered from the wild flowers and pea-fields of the old country, being more watery in consistence, and smacking strongly of the universal gum-tree.

Strolling down to a small swamp on the creek one morning, when he was cook for the day, to get two or three ducks for dinner, Harold noticed Don who was now his inseparable companion, stop at a hollow log and begin tearing at the open end with his teeth. Thinking that perhaps only a wallaby or bandicoot had taken refuge in the log, he called the dog off, and happened to mention the circumstance to the overseer, who rode up in the afternoon to see that the Simpsons were carrying out their contract satisfactorily.

"Umph!" said Bill thoughtfully. "Do you think you could find that log again?"

"Well, if *I* can't, Don can, I'll be bound; he was so very hot on it," replied Harold.

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They walked off towards the swamp, and on arriving in the neighbourhood, it became clear that the colley remembered the occurrence of the morning, and led them to the spot, when he renewed his efforts to get at whatever was inside the log. Harold pulled the dog away, and the overseer, stooping down, put his arm in as far as he could reach, scraped the wood with his fingers, gathered up some of the dry, rotten material and examined it carefully for a few moments. He picked out some hairs, laid them on the palm of his hand, and uttered the one word, "Dingo!"

It came out with a vicious snap. He then searched the ground all about the log, and picked up several small dry objects and showed them to Harold. "Dingo pups inside that log," he said. "That's their droppings the old bitch has brought out; and pretty near ready to run they are, by the look of the stuff. I don't expect she's in there now; but she's sure to come back at sundown to suckle 'em, and then she'll be wanting supper. I'll bring a poisoned bait and lay it in the log, and

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you be ready in the morning with an axe, and we'll chop the pups out, if they're not gone."

Nothing excited Bill so much as the prospect of doing a dingo to death. He hitched up his horse to a tree by the carpenters' camp, before even those early risers were well out of their blankets, and hurried Harold off to the log while the sun was yet struggling to send his level beams through the morning mist.

Humphreys thrust his arm into the hollow and felt about. "The bait's gone, anyhow," he remarked in a tone of satisfaction.

They proceeded to block up the entrance to the log with a quantity of dead wood, to prevent the escape of the inmates, and sounded the log along its whole length with the axe. About twelve feet from the entrance it gave indications of being solid, and here they set to work to hew a hole, a task which was accomplished in the course of an hour, the outer shell of wood being exceedingly hard. When the hole was large enough, Harold eagerly thrust in his arm and shoulder, and immediately felt something warm and soft.

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"Pull the beggars out," cried Humphreys.

After a deal of snarling and snapping at his hands, and much commotion inside the log, Harold drew forth one of the occupants, which the overseer seized by the hind legs and beat to death against the log. Unable to control his excitement, he plunged his arm into the hole and got hold of another. "Lor, how the little devils fight!" he said, dashing the second against the hard wood. A third, and finally a fourth, was withdrawn and promptly despatched. But Bill was not yet satisfied that they had secured the whole of the litter; and after more work with the axe, which enabled him to reach a foot or two further, he continued his explorations.

"What is it?" inquired Harold, as the overseer's face assumed an expression of bland satisfaction, while he continued tugging vigorously at some heavy body.

"*That's* it," he replied in a few moments, flinging the dead bitch upon the ground, and wiping the sweat off his face, "We've got the whole family now; and a lucky job, too, just

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about lambing time. She'd 'a had a lamb every night for that lot."

The mother had evidently returned to suckle her whelps, eaten the tempting piece of beef, and remained to die with her young. The body was rigid, the legs drawn up, and the whole set of splendid teeth displayed under the fixed, snarling lips.

As Humphreys had predicted, the litter were nearly ready to leave the nest, their age being about six weeks, and their bodies still covered with the sooty, woolly hair, so unlike that of the full-grown dingo.

The overseer, anxious to teach Don the proper business of a sheep-dog, tried to set him on to worry the body of the bitch; but he would not even approach it, though "thrice he slew the slain" by shaking the pups repeatedly and crunching them until there could have been no whole bone left in their mangled carcases.

After a fortnight's work with the carpenters, Harold returned to the head station to help in preparations for the lambing, which was close at hand.

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Late one evening, a shepherd came in with the information that while he was burning the dry, dead grass on the ridges near his hut, to provide young green feed for the ewes after lambing, the fire had got the better of him, and was extending rapidly.

Without a moment's delay, the overseer, Harold, and the stockman started off with the shepherd as hard as they could run to the scene of the fire, about two miles distant. Arriving at some elevated ground, they could see a waving line of light, half a mile long, stretched across the ridges, and advancing steadily with a hissing sound in the direction of the paddock fence.

Humphreys took in the situation at a glance, and settled the plan for checking its progress. He knew that on one side it must stop when it came to the creek, and that it could make little or no way among the grass-trees and still partially green ferns on the flats. "Come along, boys!" he cried, making off with all speed to a spot some mile or so ahead of the advancing flames. Here he gave instructions to the men to cut

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down leafy boughs of the trees, and began setting fire to the grass at several points a little distance apart, in a line parallel to that of the lurid glow to windward. As soon as the patches of fire had joined, and burned a space ten or a dozen yards wide, they beat it out with the boughs and fired it further on, thus continuing to form a wide belt of cleared ground which the fire would be unable to pass. They worked hard till midnight, for the gentle wind, now springing up to fill the space of the rarified air ascending from the fire, brought the flames more rapidly towards them, and all their labour would have been in vain had they not succeeded in opposing a barrier to it before it reached the next succession of ridges, covered with long, dry grass and inflammable underwood. Fortunately, or, rather, owing to the overseer's foresight, the spot chosen for checking the fire was on a line broken by patches of green wattle scrub, which would resist the flames, and enable them to grapple with the fire at isolated points instead of along an uninterrupted course. As the irregular wave of flame swept up to

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the burnt space it died out, but the men had another hour's severe conflict with it at the end of a ridge, where the grass was exceptionally long and dry, and they had not had time to oppose it. Volumes of hot smoke curled round them, bearing a fine soot which blackened their faces, filled their eyes, and half stifled them. Still they beat down the flames with green boughs, and almost inch by inch stemmed the fiery tide, which rolled on, devouring the rank, withered herbage, and threatening to surround them.

At length it was fairly mastered. They retreated to a neighbouring rise in the ground and surveyed the course the fire had taken. Dotted along the crests of the ridges could be seen many a dead tree, standing out from the blackened surface like a glowing tower, and at intervals a lurid light would burst from some fallen trunk smouldering into ashes, while the air was filled with an impalpable black dust, driven upwards by the heat and now settling down like a sooty fog on the cooling earth.

Pretty well done up by the severe labour of

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the last five hours, and begrimed from head to foot, the men walked slowly homewards.

Harold having expressed some surprise that the fire did not come up to his expectations of a conflagration in the Bush, according to descriptions he had read, Humphreys remarked—

"What, then, did you expect to see it go racing along at ten miles an hour? Ah, that's all my eye—in this country, anyhow. I've never seen a Bush fire in this part of the country you couldn't walk away from, or go right through for the matter of that, if you only look out for a chance and keep your wits about you. But after a very long drought, on the Victorian side, the tops of the trees will catch fire, and then the wind carries it on pretty smartly, dropping the burning sparks thirty or forty yards ahead, and so starting it in fresh places. The worst of it is, it makes the cattle so wild. They won't come back to their camps on these ridges till the young grass has sprung up again, and they have forgotten the scare they had to-night."

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CHAPTER IX.

Preparations for Lambing—Letters from "Home"—Incidents of Lambing—Value of Good Dogs—Lambs at a Frolic—Sheep-washing and Shearing—Ducking a Washer—Work in the Wool-shed—Lost Sheep—Tracking—Havoc in the Flock by Dingoes.

"LETTERS from home!" shouted Charlie Keene one evening, bursting into the overseer's hut, where Harold was boiling the billy for his own and his mate's supper.

Since he had been on Wallaroo, Harold found his time so fully occupied that he had written but one hurried letter to England —a task not by any means congenial, when it had to be performed by the glimmer of a stinking fat-lamp after a hard day's work. Indeed, he was himself surprised to find how completely the active life of the Bush indisposed him for any sedentary occupation, even reading; and, in truth, his thoughts were less frequently

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homeward bent than he was willing to confess to himself. The station, too, was cut off from any direct means of postal communication with the nearest "township," to and from which letters were conveyed by any chance that offered. The mail had just now been brought up by one of the bullock drays laden with a supply of flour, sugar, etc., for the store.

Harold's letters from his father, his brother James, and his sister, contained the usual minute inquiries as to the nature of life in Queensland, which would have occupied him a week in answering, and a remittance of twenty pounds.

Keene had a batch of papers—the *Australasian*, *Argus*, *Field*, *Illustrated London News*, etc., particularly acceptable to the young storekeeper, who, when he had done with them, could pass them round to all the huts in succession; a letter from his uncle in Brisbane, asking how he was getting on with MacNab, and offering him a "billet" in his office if he became tired of Bush life, and a small draft on MacNab for his immediate wants.

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The bright, crisp, winter weather of the past three months had now begun to give place to milder mornings, with cloudy days and soft spring showers. Everywhere on the patches of country, burnt off some weeks before, delicate green grass was springing up, with a promise of abundant feed for the ewes, the first batch of which were expected to begin lambing towards the end of August—every one hoping that it would be all well over before the heavy rains came on.

MacNab had some twelve thousand ewes, whose progeny might, at a fair computation, add nine thousand lambs to his stock. Even his lethargic nature was roused by the importance of the occasion, while all were busy making hurdle yards and pens for the accommodation of the different flocks. He growled at all hands in his accustomed fashion, found fault with Humphreys—who took no notice of his ill-humour, and ended by consoling himself with "square gin." No one knew better than the overseer that "the boss" would have muddled everything, and rendered all the men

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discontented, had he managed the lambing. Bill therefore winked at MacNab's orders, and did as he chose.

Preparations were made at the head station for the reception of three thousand ewes, including the "grannies," or oldest members of the flocks; while the remainder were to be "lambed down" at the huts by their own shepherds. Much to Harold's satisfaction, Humphreys sent him out to Mike's, at the three-mile hut, where he was well placed as assistant to his old mate, and would learn much from that experienced shepherd. Mike's dog, Smut, received Don with a wag of friendly recognition from his hind-quarters, which the handsome colley, conscious of his own growing importance, acknowledged with a somewhat condescending grace.

Everything at the hut was fixed up in the most complete manner, in anticipation of the trouble to come.

The next day after Harold's arrival the first dozen lambs were dropped, and he became initiated into the duty of attending to the

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mothers. Mike, anxious to show a good "increase," and claim the sixpence a head on all lambs beyond sixty-five per cent. that he could show at the end of a month, kept hard at work himself, and did not spare his assistant.

The night was divided into two watches of six hours each, and both men were in attendance on the ewes all day besides. The experienced mothers were left very much to themselves, and gave little trouble; but in this flock (one of the best selected on the whole run) was a large proportion of young ewes, to whom the business of adding to the squatter's stock was quite new. With these, almost superhuman patience was needed. They would wander from the flock to some secluded spot, and, after having given birth to their lambs, walk away from them as though they had not the least concern for their young. Constant watchfulness on the part of the shepherd is necessary in such cases; but, with all his care, he is compelled to make up a long list of "missing," when the lambing is over.

Every morning, the ewes with lambs were

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separated from the others, and kept in the pens. Mike took charge of these, Harold going out on the run with the rest of the flock, always accompanied by Smut and Don. The sheep kept within a short distance of home, moving slowly about, picking up the sweet blades of spring grass, and contributing throughout the day to the fleecy population of Wallaroo.

What with keeping the sheep together, bringing in the stragglers, and rendering assistance to the best of his ability, Harold found enough to occupy every minute of the day. Towards evening he would trudge home, carrying under each arm a lamb for which no owner could be found, in the hope that some of the ewes whose young had died might take to these unmothered creatures. How strange it seemed to him that many of these high-bred ewes should refuse to have anything whatever to do with their helpless progeny, appearing even to be unconscious of their existence, turning a deaf ear to the feeble wail of hunger, and spurning them from the source of nourishment! Some of the worst cases were brought into the hut every night, for

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more careful attention, and to shield them from the cold, which would soon quench the small spark of life in puny bodies craving for food and vainly seeking warmth from contact with the mother. Hour after hour Mike or Harold would spend coaxing the ewes to yield the supply of milk for which their lambs were crying, or helping the latter to obtain it in spite of the unnatural indifference and even repulsion exhibited by those so singularly devoid of the maternal instinct.

Throughout the day it was necessary to exercise the utmost vigilance to protect weakly lambs from the birds of prey which hovered around the flock, and occasionally displayed most astonishing boldness. The eye could not turn in any direction without seeing one or more of the large brown eagles sweeping in circles, on the look-out for a chance to pounce upon a deserted lamb, or a small party of crows perched on a branch discussing their hopes of a feast. But here the little bottle of strychnine, which Harold carried in his belt-pouch, did good service, and in the mornings many a fine eagle

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lay stretched out dead after feeding on the carcases of lambs carefully "salted" overnight with a few grains of the poison.

The work thus went on steadily for a fortnight, during which time the men scarcely ever had time for a comfortable meal, a decent wash, or anything like a night's rest. Almost every day the overseer rode round on his visits to Mike's and the other lambing-places, encouraging the men, and giving directions in his quiet irresistible way. The weather all through, with the exception of a few showers, turned out most favourable, rendering the lambing all round one of the best MacNab had ever had. More than eleven hundred lambs were counted out of Mike's yard, so that, if these were all alive at the end of the month, he would draw the handsome bonus of something over eight pounds for his careful management.

"Bully for you, Mike," observed Humphreys, as he put down the figures in his stock-book. "You'll have a nice little cheque to knock down before shearing-time, and then you'll come back fresh as paint—eh?"

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"And time I did, too," growled the shepherd, whose mouth watered at the bare thought of the delights of the drinking-bar in the far-distant township, "I ain't 'ad a wet this six months—tea and salt-junk, junk and tea, and trampin' arter these blessed monkeys, it's enough to make a man bust with the drought. I say, super," (coaxingly) "can't yer, now, send us out a bottle of 'square' from the store, jist one, and stick it up to me for a pair of moleskin trousers? I know you've got it, 'cause the boss, he comes out here one day last week that squiffy he couldn't hardly keep on the horse. And, 'Mike,' says he—silly like, yer know—he was in a good temper, pleased with the look of the lambs, 'whar's y'r-r p-pannikin?' And he pulls out a flask, and gives me a nobbler, neat—the right stuff, *you* bet." And Mike smacked his lips in pleasant recollection.

"Did he, now? Well," said Bill, "*p'r'aps* he has a bottle or so to himself; but you don't get any lush while I'm about. It wouldn't do."

In the increasing warmth of the midday sun, the lambs grew stronger day by day, and

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Smut's services were in constant demand, keeping the stragglers together, and looking out for "that dingo" which, he felt convinced, must be hanging round the flock. Towards evening, too, his watchfulness was unceasing. Many of the ewes would turn homewards without a thought of their lambs, which might be lying down behind a stump or a tuft of grass, and would certainly be left out in the Bush but for the care of the dogs. They worked round the rear of the flock, rousing the sleepers. Smut exhibited the utmost distress when a lively lamb, caught napping, jumped up and bolted off in the direction opposite to that it was wanted to take; or expressed comical perplexity when one stood still, staring about and baaing, as though its heart would break, for its unconcerned mother. He would shove these along with his nose, gently but firmly, until they were among the flock, never relaxing his attention for a moment, and often going over the ground again in expectation of finding some stupid creature, determined to stay out all night and sacrifice itself to the dingoes, which always

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hang about the neighbourhood of a lamb flock, or the eagles, whose piercing eyes survey the Bush with the first glimmer of daylight.

In a week or fortnight more, a new form of trouble began with the lambs, now grown active and vigorous. When the shepherds had brought their flock up to the yard the most tiresome business of the day consisted in getting it into the fold. The ewes walked in at the gate in the customary manner, but the lambs considered this a favourable time for indulging in a frolic. They raced round and round the yard, taking excursions in a long stream to some distance and returning at full speed past the gate as if no entrance existed. Time after time when, by the united efforts of the men and dogs they had been brought in a compact body up to the gate, they were seized with a spirit of perversity, and, splitting into two streams, raced off in opposite directions. For an hour at a time on fine evenings would the obstinate creatures pursue these tactics, to the great irritation of the men, who were already worried enough with their vagaries throughout

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the day, and wanting their supper. After a time, the ewes would begin to file out of the yard to look for their lambs, which added another difficulty to the situation. Not until they were thoroughly tired did they show any disposition to give up the game of romps, and then Smut had an opportunity of dealing with them. He knew that he must first get the two divergent streams into one mob. Having done this, he bustled them quickly towards the gate, and, as they were about to race past it, dashed ahead, turned the leaders, and pressing against the checked mass, shouldered some through the gate. Little by little—like pouring beans into a narrow-necked bottle—the whole mob was gathered in and secured for the night.

Then began a babel of cries for mothers and anxious searchings for lambs, the bleatings of the young mingling with the harsh baaing of the ewes. The confused mass moved about incessantly, each ewe endeavouring to find her own lamb, and each lamb its mother—a task apparently impossible of accomplishment in the general disorder. Here would be a lamb, not at

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all particular so long as it got its supper, worrying a ewe to which it did not belong, in spite of repeated angry attempts to repel it. Mothers ran hither and thither, smelling every lamb they met, until, with a sudden sign of recognition two in the crowd rushed together, and all was well for them, at least. But where more than a thousand lambs were seeking to be accommodated, each with its rightful mother, it was long before the turmoil abated. By some means, however, every one was at length suited, and when Harold went out to have a last look round before turning in, nothing could be heard but the breathing of the flock, the soft murmur of a thousand mouths chewing the cud, or the occasional bleat of some ewe crooning affectionately over her lamb.

Towards the end of the first week in October, when the ewes could be separated from their lambs, and the weather during the day had become sufficiently warm, the overseer prepared for another important event—that of bringing all the flocks in rotation to the head station for the shearing. Men in twos and threes, on the

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look out for this annual job, rode in on nags of all sorts and conditions, and took up their quarters in the wool-shed and the travellers' hut. The overseer calculated that, with twenty hands at work, doing an average of fifty sheep per day each, taking the smart and slow shearers all round, and with the help of a few of the loafers that come out into the Bush at this time to do the sheep-washing and make themselves generally useful, he would get it over in the course of a month.

MacNab was fortunate in the possession of a splendid wash-pool, a quarter of a mile long, formed by a lake-like expansion of Myall Creek, with a sandy bottom, and grassed down to the water's edge. Along the side of this were large receiving yards for the sheep, connected with the water by narrow lanes for admitting the sheep as they came from the wash-pool, fences being erected to prevent them from escaping at the opposite side.

Mike's ewes and one of the large wether flocks were brought in first and yarded together, some three thousand in all, and by the

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first light of the morning the operation of washing began. A batch of sheep were passed down the lane and into the water to a dozen men, standing waist deep, who rubbed and squeezed their wool all over for some time to get out the rough dirt, and guided them into a yard, where they would stand and soak for an hour preparatory to being again driven into the water and subjected to a more thorough shampooing and cleansing before being finally allowed to leave the pool, and be formed into a flock under the charge of a shepherd to feed for the rest of the day. At night they were again yarded, and in the course of a couple of days, when the "yolk" or natural grease, which gives the wool its suppleness, had returned, they were ready for the shearers, who received them in convenient batches in the wool-shed, and stripped off the fleeces to the monotonous "click, click" of the shears and many an objurgation from the men on the limbs and eyes of the struggling animals, varied every now and then by a peremptory call for "tar" to stop the bleeding from an accidental snip in the skin.

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Harold found sheep-washing no light work. In and out of the water during five or six hours every day, hauling the sheep about, and pounding away at the fleeces with his hands, he turned in at night on his hard bunk with a sensation of stiffness in every limb which scarcely wore off by the middle of the next day. From the washers he met with a great deal of the the rough chaff that "new chums" are compelled to put up with, taken good-humouredly enough where it was inoffensively given. But one ill-conditioned fellow, notorious for his laziness except when the overseer was looking on, too often overstepped the bounds of permissible licence, and made himself offensive by such remarks as, "Yer mother wouldn't know yer, Mr. New Chum—what's-y'r-name—if she could only see yer a muckin' about with these 'ere bloomin' monkeys;" or, "Think a lot o' yerself, I dessay. Do the work by the piece, an' make the boss think we all ought ter slave our guts out too? Not me; an' you'd better stash it an' knock off for a bit when the rest of us does." Seeing that Harold took no notice

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of this, beyond an occasional admonition to mind his own business, the man made every opportunity possible of splashing him under the pretence of being unwontedly busy with a troublesome sheep. When the intention of it became placed beyond doubt by the repetition of these petty insults, Harold suddenly caught the fellow by a leg and an arm, and bundled him head foremost over the fence into the deep water of the wash-pool, followed by a chorus of laughter from the washers. Boiling with rage, the man scrambled on to dry land and challenged Harold to come out, and "he'd see what he'd give him." Reluctant as Harold was to be a party to any unnecessary row, he could not put up with the foul abuse that the fellow continued to utter. Stepping quickly from the water, and seeing in an instant that his opponent's form in squaring up was that of a very indifferent boxer, he dodged a blow, closed, and threw him heavily with the "cross buttock," a reminiscence of the wrestling matches at old Rugby, in which he had always taken a leading place. The fellow picked himself up, glared

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fiercely at Harold, put himself into a fighting attitude again, thought better of it, and walked off sulkily to spend the remainder of the day in his bunk. The affair occupied but a few seconds, scarcely long enough for the other washers to gather round the combatants in expectation of a bit of fun, when it was all over but the laughter, and a derisive shout from one of them, "Hi, chummy, didn't quite know where you was jist now, did yer?—all sparks and fireworks; ha, ha, ha!" and confidentially, to one of the men, "Shouldn't wonder, now, if the youngster could play with his mauleys a bit smart, too, when he's roughed up."

Harold returned to his work undisturbed by the incident, and quite unconscious of having established a character for "smartness" among the men who had witnessed his summary chastisement of the insolent braggart.

Humphreys and Mike, the only two judges of wool on the station, spent most of their time in sorting the fleeces according to quality, forming them into bales in the wool-press, and marking them with the station brand and

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numbers, corresponding with the description of them in the ledger. When the last fleece had been taken off, and the last bale pressed, the overseer calculated that the clip had yielded about twenty-seven tons of wool, at a value of something over £4000 in the London market. In the next two months, bullock-drays would be loading up all over Queensland to carry the season's produce down to many a seaport, while MacNab's would be sent to the railway terminus at Allora.

During the months of shearing, the storekeeper had had "a beastly time," as Keene expressed it, serving out the regular rations, doing the butchering with any chance help he could get, attending to the wants of shearers and washers, and being at the beck and call of every one who required extra tea, sugar, tobacco, jam, sardines, and other luxuries to be "stuck up" against the wages account. His books, however, kept with the utmost neatness and precision, elicited a grunt of satisfaction from MacNab, who was conscious of the state of muddle they always

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fell into when he had the management of them.

A few days after the shearers had been paid off and gone away to another job, and the flocks had been drafted and counted, and comfortably settled down at various out-stations, an event occurred which seriously disturbed the overseer's usual equanimity.

Some four miles from the head station, almost on the northern boundary of the run, was a hut occupied by two shepherds who managed three thousand strong wethers. Humphreys had repeatedly but ineffectually pointed out to MacNab the danger of keeping so many sheep together in rough, broken country, just on the line of the migrations of the Warrego Blacks, not five miles from the Myall Hills, which sheltered a large mob of "scrubber" cattle, and were known to be an unmolested nursery of dingoes. These hills were a sort of no-man's land, so wild and rocky that, though it belonged to a run further westward, it was seldom visited by the owner.

Near this out-station were placed the head

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stockman's yards and huts, for the express purpose of keeping a watch on the Wallaroo cattle and preventing the cows from being enticed away into the hills by the "scrubber" bulls.

Soon after midday, one of the shepherds of this large flock came in, breathless and excited, with the report that had lost a number of sheep. The flock had been feeding in the deep gullies, where he could see but a third of them at any one time, and a sudden rush convinced him that something was wrong. They "bunched up," and turned their heads in one direction. He immediately brought them home, and in counting them into the yard found, as near as he could estimate, a hundred missing.

Humphreys asked several questions. "Had he seen any signs of the Blacks?" "Had he heard any dingoes howling at night lately?" "No;" the man could afford no explanation of the occurrence. His dog had given no warning. "It all happened in a moment like."

The overseer lost no time in getting horses in from the paddock and mounting all the

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available men, with Pompey, whose services as a tracker might be useful, in attendance.

The party soon arrived at the spot pointed out by the shepherd as that at which the sheep were lost. Here the old black fellow dismounted, and throwing the bridle over his arm, carefully examined the ground, in order to get on the tracks of the sheep that had diverged from the main body. This proved no easy task. The soft green grass thickly covered all the hollows, and the ridges more thinly. The fronds of young ferns formed a carpet over the rich soil of the flats, on which it did not seem to Harold possible for any eye to trace the imprint of a hoof. No rain either had fallen during the past few days, and the ground, even where a few bare patches appeared, was too dry to take a distinct impression. Those of the men who had some experience in tracking, among whom Bill was an adept, for a white man, cast all round for a sign of the line the missing sheep had taken.

"If we don't pick up the track before dark," observed the overseer to Harold, after an hour's

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fruitless quest, "the dingoes 'll tear the guts out of every one of 'em before morning."

Meanwhile Pompey had been quietly pursuing his investigations alone, and had wandered far from the rest, stooping close to the ground every now and then in close scrutiny of some sign that attracted his attention; often retracing his steps to verify his conclusions, or picking up a bruised blade of grass, or broken fern frond, which afforded him some definite information. He had long since satisfied himself that the Blacks had not driven off the sheep; for the faintest indication of their presence would have been proclaimed immediately to one accustomed to follow human footsteps in the native fashion.

A loud but distant Coo-oo-oo-oo-ee brought all the party round Pompey, who pointed silently to a deep mark in some muddy sand, washed up by the last freshet, a few days previously, in a tiny rivulet at the bottom of a gully. The points of young grass were just breaking through the deposit, but not enough to conceal the indubitable print of a sheep's

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hoof, evidently going at a gallop. Pompey raised his arm and pointed to the northwards.

"Me b'leeve dingo drive 'm likey Myall scrubs."

The dogs were put on, and seemed to make something of the scent up the side of the gully, but did not show themselves keen on it. Many minutes elapsed before anything further could be made out, when some fresh droppings were picked up, and presently Pompey's sharp eye caught sight of a drop of blood on a dead leaf. Now the dogs took up the scent hotly, Don leading off at a round pace over the country, which became every moment more rocky and broken, and covered with patches of low brushwood, rendering it difficult to keep him in view. He clearly knew now what was wanted, and ere long his barking announced the discovery of something important.

The men, riding up immediately, found him near a small deep creek, in a rocky bed strewn with boulders, and the lost sheep jammed against the bank, where the poor wretches, exhausted by their exertions to escape, and paralyzed with

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terror by the attack of the dingoes, had crowded together; their enemies behind them, and the scarcely less dreaded water in front of them. There the closely packed mass had stood, helpless for hours, while the savage dingoes ran round, tearing the flesh from the hind-quarters of the sheep, which in many cases were stripped to the bone. Numbers lay dead or dying; some still kept their legs, with their bowels trailing on the ground, and the newly shorn skins of almost all were smeared with blood.

The overseer surveyed the scene of carnage with a disgust expressed in a few emphatic sentences, which would have wiped all dingoes out of existence forthwith, had strong words availed.

"Over a score killed," he remarked bitterly, "as many more likely to die, and half the rest hacked about somewhere."

Harold asked how many dingoes he supposed had been at this work, and was much surprised at the universal opinion that three or four were quite capable of having committed

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all this havoc among a hundred and fifty sheep in the course of the afternoon.

There was nothing now to be done but to put the worst of the wounded out of their misery, and get the remainder home. But so stupefied with terror were the survivors, that they still kept crowded against the bank of the creek, and the men were obliged to drag them away one by one, and place them in charge of the dogs, who then had enough to do to prevent those that were unhurt from rushing off wildly in every direction. A sorry sight they presented on the way to the yard, some so badly crippled that they could could scarcely crawl, others carrying a crushed hind-leg, and many dropping blood at every step on that weary homeward journey of four miles.

"Now," said Bill, when the men had got away with the sheep, and proceeding to whet his knife on his stirrup leather, "those cursed brutes have had their fun—they hadn't time to get a feed—and they'll be back here at dark for certain. How much poison have you got?"

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Harold produced his strychnine bottle, nearly full, from the saddle-pouch.

"That'll do, with what there is in mine. Help me to get the skin off this sheep."

When the operation was completed, the overseer explaining meanwhile that the dingoes would be sure to prefer this to the trouble of tearing the skin from the others, he cut off a dozen fleshy pieces, inserted a few grains of strychnia in each with the point of his knife, and scattered them round the carcase, remarking grimly—

"Tit-bits, them, for the first-comers—make their mouths water for more. And when their insides begin to burn, there's water handy; but if they drink till they bu'st, that won't cool their hot coppers; ha, ha, ha!"

To make assurance doubly sure, he pricked more poison into the flesh of the carcase in many places, until the bottles were completely emptied, and the two men mounted and rode home as the sun was setting gloriously behind the Myall Hills.

MacNab, having heard that sheep were lost,

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came out while Humphreys was unsaddling his horse, blustering and threatening to sack the shepherd and stop his cheque; to all which fuss the overseer replied—

"I told you how it would be. It's no fault of the man's. The dingoes cut off a point of his sheep when he couldn't see 'em; and the best thing he could do was to take the flock home. Jolly lucky for you it's no worse. Why do you want to stick a big mob like that out on country only fit for cattle, when there's any amount of room for 'em on the flats round the lagoons, and only for the expense of putting up a hut and a yard? They'd grow better wool, too, than on that rough rubbish about the stony ridges."

The squatter walked off without a word, conscious of his inability to hold his own on questions of management with Bill Humphreys.

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CHAPTER X.

"Clearing up the Run"—Marking and Branding—Nearly caught by a Cow—The Overseer shoots a Savage Bull—His Horse killed by a Bullock—Harold has an Unexpected Meeting, a Ride for Life, and a Narrow Escape—He mounts the Buck-jumper, "Bendigo," gets a "Buster," and masters him—A Dangerous Fall in the Bush.

THE lambing and shearing being now well over, the overseer turned his attention to "clearing up the run," which consisted in mustering and marking all the young cattle and foals that had escaped former visits to the stock-yard for this purpose. One evening —the fifth of November as it happened, and "not a penny squib to celebrate the event," as Keene ruefully remarked—a conclave was held in the overseer's hut, at which Joe, the head stockman, attended, to consult on the plan of operations for the next month's work. Joe

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calculated that there were probably between four hundred and five hundred "clean skins" —that is, unbranded stock—on Wallaroo, and another hundred might, perhaps, be "nipped" from old Smith's scrubs; a phrase by which he intended to convey that all cattle and horses of doubtful ownership found on the boundary (or a good way over it, for the matter of that) might be run in on the principle "first come, first served," and receive the brand which would thenceforth constitute them beyond legal dispute MacNab's property. That Humphreys understood, and fully appreciated the force of the expression was clear from his remark, "Serve the old fool right. If he don't look after his cows and calves, we'll do it for him."

By the end of December, too, a hundred and fifty head of fat cattle were to be delivered to a large butcher near Allora, and the overseer himself would take these down. It was decided to work the outskirts of the run first, while the horses were fresh, leaving the cattle near home to the last. About twenty-five horses, good, bad, and indifferent, and more or less "broken,"

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were available for mounting the five men who could be spared for the work, including Harold. Saddles and girths had to be examined, a few doubtful places in the stock-yard and gates made secure, and the overgrown hoofs of the horses which had been long in the Bush pared of their rough edges, to prevent them from stumbling, as horses taken up fresh are very apt to do.

The first mob, of about a hundred cattle, got in were among the rowdiest on the whole run, and made it particularly lively for the men drafting in the yards. Even the imperturbable overseer was compelled to bolt for the fence several times; and Harold, pursued by an irate cow, and feeling that he would be caught by her horns if he tried to run up the fence, threw himself on the ground, and rolled under the lowest rail, where there was just room to admit his body. A second later, and he would have been pinned through the back. As it was, the cow, in spite of the shock of the collision with the fence, dropped on her knees and endeavoured to pound him as he lay under the protection of

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the rail, until some skilfully placed cuts from Bill's stock-whip drove her off.

Day by day Harold became more fully initiated into the work of mustering and drafting, which, rough and dangerous as it was, especially to a novice, had all the charm of sport for him. Could he have realized to himself the scene in a stock-yard—the host of rushing beasts, half maddened by fear, their horns clashing as they careered round their prison, crowding and crushing each other against the massive fence, enveloped in a cloud of dust, from out of which a furious bullock would charge suddenly straight for one of the men, the bellowing and groaning, the shouting, turmoil, and confusion—he could not have believed that he should ever stand in the midst of that hurricane of horns and hoofs calm, watchful, and prepared for every emergency, with nothing but a stout stick in his hands.

The strain on the horses in bringing up the cattle from the run was very severe. Girth-galls and sore backs rendered several useless, so that the mounts were continually changed.

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What with varieties of temper, different mouths, and no mouths at all, more or less determined bucking, and tricks of all kinds, Harold had every opportunity of taking the measure of the average stock-horse. It was work enough to get the bridle on some, the saddle on others. One savage brute always tried to break the man's ribs with a kick of its hind-leg when being girthed up, and another would stamp upon the toes of any one who did not know the trick.

"Lend me your revolver to-day," said Humphreys one morning to Harold, as they were just starting to get in a mob from the flats near the Maranoa lagoons, "there's a nasty old brute of a bull in the mob that always gives us a lot of trouble, breaking away just as we get 'em up to the yard, and taking half the mob with him. He's a vicious devil, too. Last mustering, he crippled one of the best horses. I've often promised him a pill, and he shall have it to-day, if I get anywhere near enough."

Harold mounted on Boxer, and Humphreys on a slower but very clever stock-horse of his

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own breaking, trotted off, with Joe and another stockman, for the lagoon flats, and got among the cattle almost before they were well away from their camp. A few minutes sufficed to round them up, and the overseer kept a sharp look-out for the bull, which at length he recognized in the middle of the herd by a white spot on its rump. Whirling his stock-whip round his head, Bill dashed into the mob, and was soon plying the terrible lash on the tenderest places of the animal's hide, and edging it towards the outskirts of the herd, as pretty a piece of "cutting out" work as one could wish to see.

By-and-by, the beast came plunging clear out of the ruck, and made a sudden half halt and a charge, in the hope of overturning its pursuer. But the horseman shot past, and in another moment closed up on the animal's left flank. Humphreys now worked the revolver round ready to his right hand, drew it, and spurring his horse abreast of the bull, fired two bullets in quick succession behind its shoulder. A few plunging strides forward, and the bull fell on its face, burying one horn in the ground.

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The overseer pulled up with an exulting shout, "Ha, ha, ha! he's got to-ko this time;" and, leaving the expiring bull, rode off after the cattle.

The day was destined to be eventful. The cattle, excited and angry at being bustled along so smartly, showed frequent signs of rowdiness, although hitherto they had been kept from breaking by the steady application of the stock-whips to some of the most troublesome customers. One of these, however, thinking, perhaps, that he had an easy victim, made a dash at unsuspecting Harold, which the overseer's quick eye at once detected. Making a great effort, Bill spurred forward and cut in between Harold and the beast; but only in time to receive the charge himself. Horse and man went down together in a bundle. Harold, unconscious of the peril he had escaped, looked over his shoulder on hearing the dull thud of the collision, saw that a catastrophe had happened, pulled up, and turned round.

Humphreys had fallen clear of his horse, by a miracle, and was now on his legs, with the

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bridle in his hand. "It's all up with *him*; and *I* ain't had such a 'buster' for many a year," he said, as soon as he regained his breath. "Just you wait and get the saddle and bridle off when he's done kicking, and I'll jump on Boxer and go after the mob."

Harold found himself alone, his mind in a state of confusion as to the events of the last two minutes. The horse lay on its side, struggling and groaning. From a terrible rent in its flank, where the horn of the bullock had penetrated, flowed a stream of blood which gathered in a dark pool on the earth, and spouted out afresh at every movement. The poor beast rolled from side to side in vain efforts to rise; but its life ebbed rapidly away, the slight quivering of its limbs soon telling that the scene was closed. Harold then removed the saddle and bridle, and carried them home to the head station, some three miles distant.

Not until the day's work in the stock-yard was over, and he sat down to supper in the overseer's hut, did he realize, from the answers to his questions, how gallantly Humphreys had

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risked his own life to stop the charging bullock.

"I understand it all now," said Harold, warmly, grasping his friend's hand. "I might not have been here now, if you had not seen my danger, and taken all the risk on yourself. There's no doubt that you saved my life, or at least some broken bones. But how you managed to escape yourself, I can't make out."

"Oh, it's all right," replied Bill. "Don't make too much of it. There were you riding along, without knowing that the brute was coming at you like a steam engine—nor Boxer neither—and I couldn't wait and see you both go over, like I did a man once, and he never spoke again. Lucky it's no worse." Bill pulled off his shirt, and showed a severe bruise over his hip, where he had fallen upon the revolver. "That's all I've got, and a bit of a twist in my shoulder. Pity that good horse is killed, though."

A few days afterwards a very wild mob had to be got in from the hilly country up the creek, and the overseer mustered all the men for

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what would be likely to be a troublesome task, requiring a thorough knowledge of the cattle camps, and the scrubs in which they would take refuge as soon as they were disturbed. Feeling that Harold would be of no use in this, the overseer gave him a steady horse, putting his own saddle on Boxer. In reply to Harold's expressions of disappointment, he explained that they intended to sweep the foot of the Myall Hills, in order to pick up some stragglers, known to be over the boundary of the run, and that nobody not thoroughly familiar with the Bush in that direction "would have a chance of seeing the way the cattle went."

Harold, however, determined not to be out of it altogether, gladly accepted a compromise. They started before daylight, and he was posted some two miles from home, with instructions to wait there until the cattle showed at the edge of the timber. The sight of a man would then, it was expected, keep them from crossing the creek and doubling back to their old quarters.

The morning broke gloriously, a sudden

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flood of light instantly dispersing the film of mist which a moment before had marked with a white line the course of the creek winding through the valley to join the Maranoa, ten miles away; and from the water now flashed silvery reflections, in beautiful contrast to the emerald ground of the plain, which stretched in unbroken expanse westward to the banks of the Warrego.

How rapidly the transition from grey dawn to the golden glow spread over the landscape, when the sun lifted the edge of its burnished disc above the horizon line! The light breeze, which this moment was fluttering the narrow leaves of the blue gums, would not now bend a spider's web. Minute by minute the picture changes! No blending of tones in that dry atmosphere, no "rosy-fingered" Aurora touching the hill-tops with the soft, slow-fading tints of temperate climes. The sun is up with a rush of burning rays, propelled from that cloudless east, and the Australian day has begun in almost noontide splendour of light.

An early summer morning like this filled

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Harold with a sense of exhilaration such as he never experienced in the old country; and he felt greatly tempted to indulge in a wild gallop over the plain across the creek. But he must not desert his post. Slackening the bridle, he let his horse feed on the tufts of luxuriant grass that reached to its knees, listening the while to the strange sounds emanating from the forest before him. A laughing-jackass flitted over his head, perched itself on a dead bough, eyed him in a "what-are-you-doing-here" manner, uttered a sardonic laugh, and disappeared. A pair of white cockatoos swung themselves, head downwards, at the end of the topmost branch of a great gum-tree, making love to each other in strains as harsh as one hears from the wooden clapper of a plough-boy scaring birds in an English wheat-field—Ka-ka-tua, ka-ka-tua, ka-ka-tua — ending with that piercing scream, which, had it ever smote on the ear of Dante, might have inspired one more line of the "Inferno."

The sun mounted high in the north, betokening the approach of noon, as Harold judged

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from the small shadow cast by his horse; but he saw no sign of the cattle. Frequently he fancied he heard the crack of the stock-whips. It was only the last sharp note of the coachman-bird's singular call to his mate.

This sentinel work was becoming tedious. The heat pierced to his skin through his flannel shirt, and his narrow-brimmed felt hat afforded no protection from the burning sun. He would ride slowly into the shade of the forest, to the crest of that ridge yonder, and look round. Nearing it, the horse pricked its ears and became restless. Harold pulled up. What was that? Surely he heard a stick break; and what is that above the ridge in front? The head and horns of a bullock, scarcely a hundred yards off! Now another appears beside it; and to the right another, and to the left more heads; and still they come, rising, as it were, out of the earth between the trees, silently, mysteriously — a serried phalanx of horns ranged before him, without sound or movement in the compact body.

The stockmen had brought the mob at a fast

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pace to this spot, and halted to breathe their horses before making a final drive to the stock-yard. The cattle, finding themselves unexpectedly headed by Harold, held back; while he had thus unconsciously wandered up to the very front of the mob, which now formed almost a semicircle, and seemed to be closing round him. Still he had not the least suspicion that he was in a most critical position, until the crack of a stock-whip, followed by a shout on the far side of the ridge, started the mob, and his horse swung round and bolted at full gallop. Then behind him came the crashing of boughs, and the thunder of many hundreds of hoofs. No living thing could have held its ground, as the horse well knew, if overtaken by that torrent of terrified beasts urged forward by the stockmen's shouts. Harold felt himself swept onwards like a dry leaf in a tornado. A momentary glance behind revealed a host of horns and waving tails speeding in his rear, threatening destruction to whatever might stand in its way. Fortunately his horse was fresh, and, answering to the spur, carried him

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some distance ahead, when he was enabled to pull out of the line and see the hurly-burly go by, with the stockmen close at the heels of the flying mob. The overseer shouted something that Harold did not catch, and he tailed in behind the cattle, just in time to see the slip-rails put up and the men fling themselves from their tired horses.

"You nearly got into a nice mess there," observed Humphreys, cutting up a pipe of tobacco, while Harold tied his horse to the rails. "How the mischief did you come to be in front of the mob?" And, after hearing Harold's explanation, "If they'd got you between the fences—and a minute more would have done it—they'd have rushed you right before 'em into the yard, and mashed you up, horse and all, till there was nothing but stirrup-irons left." *

Harold, on reflection, came to the same con-

* Strong fences are built, reaching a distance of three hundred yards on each side of the stock-yard, and converging towards the gate in the form of the letter V, to keep the cattle together while being driven in, and prevent them from passing the entrance.

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clusion, and determined to keep out of a similar predicament in future.

Two days' hard work disposed of the young beasts which had to be branded in this lot, and to Pompey was assigned the job of "tailing" them.

Every evening Harold ran down to the wash-pool before supper to have a swim, and rid himself of the filth accumulated during the day; for, what with the heat and perspiration, the dust kicked up in the yard—mostly dried cow-dung—and the blood from the clipped ears of the calves, no butcher's apprentice could have been in a more nasty condition. The overseer, who could not swim, contented himself with a paddle and rub down in the shallow sheep-washing inclosures. Unfortunately, getting into the same dirty clothes again seriously discounted the effect of these pleasant ablutions. In Harold's whole wardrobe, consisting of three shirts, two pairs of trousers, and a few socks, not a single article had been washed during the past month. From morning to night the work on the station had been so heavy that he could

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only ring the changes on these things as they came to hand, throwing them aside when done with, until he despaired of making any selection which should ensure comparative cleanliness.

With the object of giving the cattle a few days' rest, Humphreys told Joe to bring up some of the horses from the neighbourhood of his out-station; and the men put them into the stock-yard early one morning.

"Here's your chance now, Bertram, if you want to try a regular clinker—Bendigo's in the yard," called out the overseer.

Nothing loth, Harold, who had already managed several awkward customers, brought out his saddle and bridle. Word rapidly went round the huts that he was going to mount the redoubtable buck-jumper; and a select number of spectators assembled to "see the 'new chum' slung"—though not one of them would have put his leg across the animal for any money. Drafting the other horses into a smaller yard, the overseer left Bendigo racing round the big stock-yard and kicking up the dust for a few minutes; then, taking the bridle in his hand,

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he quickly cornered the brute with his whip. "Now, bail up, you ugly devil, will you?" as the horse stood facing him and eyeing the dreaded lash. The resolute tone and bearing of the man made an immediate impression, and an attempt to rear and strike out with its fore-legs was promptly stopped by a tremendous cut across the horse's shoulder, from which the blood slowly trickled down.

"A lively job I'm in for," thought Harold to himself.

For some moments Bill stood looking fixedly at the enemy. Step by step he advanced, seized the horse's nose in his vice-like grip, slipped the bit into its mouth, and buckled the chin-strap smartly.

They were old acquaintances—these two—and the horse acknowledged its master by walking quietly into the middle of the yard, where Harold waited with the saddle.

"Keep clear of his blooming heels—come up to his shoulder; there, now, gently does it," as Harold settled the stock-saddle on its back, while Bill held its head by both reins tightened

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under the lower jaw—in such hands an effectual curb.

In spite of the stamping and kicking, Harold pulled up the girths and buckled them securely. Drawing the near-rein short, and grasping the mane-lock, with his toe in the stirrup-iron and his right hand on the cantle of the saddle, he was on Bendigo's back almost before the spectators had time to run to the side of the stock-yard, ready to bolt up the fence out of danger.

The horse was taken by surprise; but the instant it felt the weight of the rider it sprang forward with a desperate effort to unseat him. "Not *quite* so soon, my boy," muttered Harold through his clenched teeth, as he got his foot well into the off-stirrup; "we're going to have a tussle for it yet, take my word." Another plunge forward to no purpose. Then the horse put down its head, hogged its back, drew its legs together, and leaped five feet clear off the ground, coming down with a shock that went through every bone in the rider's body.

"Now he's at it, to rights," exclaimed Bill excitedly.

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Time after time did Bendigo spring into the air, landing now on his hind-legs, now on his front, after every leap, and bounding here and there like a huge indiarubber ball—for all semblance to the action of a horse was lost in the acrobatic contortions into which the creature managed to throw itself. At one moment Harold could see nothing of the beast but a tuft of mane, at the next its ears almost brushed his face. Away it would dash across the yard, trying to jam the rider's leg against the fence, and again leap backwards, sidewards, and upwards, or spin round in circles, like a dog hunting its own tail. None but a man in the finest condition could have held on for two seconds. Harold felt the strain in every muscle, but his strength showed no sign of failing. Whose wind would last longest—the man's or the horse's? That was the question now.

The struggle had gone on for three or four minutes with grim determination on the part of both to fight it out, when Bill, detecting something wrong, exclaimed, "By jingo, the girth's gone! It's all up now. He'll slip the crupper directly."

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Bendigo knew it too, and redoubled his efforts. A few bounds more, and the second girth was seen swinging under his belly. Harold felt himself going on to the horse's neck, and the next plunge shot him, still gripping the saddle with his legs, right over the beast's ears to the dusty ground, amidst a chorus of laughter from the spectators.

Bill ran to the prostrate man, who was trying to stagger to his feet. "Any bones broken —eh?"

"No-o—only—a bit dazed. Where is he? He shan't beat me that way."

"Bully for you," said Bill, chuckling. "Cuss them rotten saddler's girths. You're going to tackle him again, then? All right; have my saddle. It's got a broad, green-hide girth a bull couldn't break. But take a breather while I catch him. Here, Jimmy, hand my saddle off the fence yonder."

Harold found that he had a nasty rick in the loins, but beyond that, a bruised eye, and a mouthful of dirt, felt little the worse for his fall.

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Bendigo, elated by his victory, was careering round the stock-yard with the bridle dangling.

"Into the crush-lane you go this time," said Bill, opening the gate and sending the horse with a slash across its quarters between the fences, where it had no room to turn, and putting a couple of rails up behind its heels.

Confined in this narrow space, with its head up to the cross fence in front, and its tail jammed against the bars behind, the refractory animal could offer no resistance to the men putting on the fresh saddle and drawing the girths tighter than before.

At one side of the fence was a gate, leading out of the lane into the large yard, through which Bill dragged the horse by the bridle. Bendigo proved more difficult to mount than at first. He lashed out behind, spun round, and tried to rear, but with a man of Bill's great strength at his head forcing down his jaw, he could not rise from the ground. Very cunningly the beast dodged and shifted his position whenever Harold lifted his toe to the stirrup.

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"Now try—quick," said Bill, grasping the horse's left ear.

Harold was up and firmly seated before Bill let go. To his rider's surprise, Bendigo moved off in an awkward sidelong canter without bucking. But this was not to last. He was trying the strength of the girth. At it he went again, if possible more furiously than ever, lurching round the yard, leaping from the ground in a rapid succession of short jerks, pitching violently on his fore-legs, curving his back like a spring to fly out again straight as a bar, and reeling over to one side or the other so much that it seemed he must inevitably fall on his side. Harold, however, with his feet well home in the stirrup-irons, felt confident. During the last minute Bendigo had been breathing short. He staggered when he landed on the ground. Bill's quick eye noticed it.

"Now you have him," he cried exultingly, "punish him, give it him with the spurs." This brought on another paroxysm of bucking, and Bendigo screamed with rage.

Harold gathered the reins up short, and sent

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the rowels deep into the horse's flanks. "Now it's *my* turn; you've had yours," thought the rider, plying his spurs vigorously, urging the horse round and round the yard at a hard gallop, pulling up short, swinging him round suddenly, and doing his utmost to get another struggle out of the now-beaten horse.

By this time, the spectators, seeing the change that had taken place in the aspect of affairs, came down from their perches on the fence and cheered vociferously. But Harold had no disposition to further punish the animal, which was reeling beneath him at every stride. He pulled the vicious beast on to its haunches, sprang from its back and seized its head. Covered with dust, sweat, and foam, his sides heaving, his eyes wild and glaring, his flanks besmeared with blood, Bendigo stood trembling before his victor.

Bill removed the saddle, and let down the slip-rails. As the vanquished buck-jumper trotted off into the paddock, with a final kick in the air, Bill turned to the loudest laugher among the men, and remarked with sarcastic

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emphasis, "Jimmy, my pippin, I'll give *you* Bendigo to ride next time you go round ration-carrying. He'll be just the thing for you."

"Well," observed Harold, shouldering his saddle and walking down to the house with Bill, "that's about a day's work for a man. I don't want to be on a worse one than Bendigo for the next six months."

"*Worse!*" laughed Bill; "if there's any worse, I don't know where to find 'em. The only thing is some of 'em take to rolling, and then its 'look out' for the rider, unless he's deuced smart. I saw a horse-breaker badly hurt that way. Broke his thigh and ever so many ribs, but they got him to the township on a bullock-dray, and the doctor pulled him through. It's these flash horse-breaking chaps makes all the buck-jumpers, by knocking 'em about and putting a man on 'em before they know how to carry anything, or giving 'em any sort of a mouth. There's one on Yarrambool now—a sturdy little useful horse, very low at the wither. He's bucked a man off, saddle and all, without breaking the girths. They run

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him in for a bit of fun now and then, to give the new chums and strangers a slinger. But he wouldn't try it on with me or you. He knows when a rider crosses his back what he's got on him. Bendigo's quite another sort—a powerful young horse, full of pluck, ruined by the clumsy fool that humbugged him when he was a colt. He'll kill a man some day—sure as fate. If he belonged to me, I'd put a bullet through him and 'a done with it."

Branding the colts occupied the whole of the remainder of the day, and on the following morning the overseer took Harold out with him to help in picking up some of the quieter cattle, including the working bullocks, from a camp near Mike's hut. When some fifty head had been put together and started on the way to the stock-yard, Humphreys left them in charge of Harold, with instructions to jog them along easily, while he himself went off to visit some of the sheep stations.

Led by the working bullocks, the little mob gave no trouble, and, as the day was already fiercely hot, Harold sat at ease in the saddle,

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and let the horse go his own pace. When trotting down a slight declivity strewn with loose angular stones, the horse, without a moment's warning, stumbled forward and fell, pinning the rider to the ground with his left leg under the animal's shoulder, and his right over the saddle. The shock stunned him; but, on regaining consciousness he realized his critical position. Should the horse, which at present lay motionless but groaning, make an effort to rise, it must, by the nature of the sloping ground, turn over and crush him to death. He could not move his leg an inch. For all he knew, his thigh might now be broken, it gave him so much pain. What could be done? Unless the weight was removed he must faint. Was it possible to make the horse raise its shoulder? He thought of several expedients, any one of which would be nearly certain to make the horse struggle to gain its legs, and roll upon his body. Even now his head was swimming, and he felt that a desperate attempt must be made at any risk.

He could just reach with his right hand the

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long knife in his belt, which he drew and passed into his left hand, that he might reach forward and give the horse a sudden stab behind the ear. It was a last chance. Death or release. He drove the knife home. The horse started, and raised its head and shoulder for an instant. With a supreme effort Harold drew his leg from beneath it, and rolled himself clear some yards down the slope; while the animal floundered about, struggling and kicking on the very spot where he had lain.

What a relief it was to be clear of that danger, at least! But should he be able to get up? He made strong efforts to overcome the sensation of sickness creeping on him, dragged himself some distance from the horse and swooned. As soon as he came round, he moved his leg and ascertained that, though severely bruised and benumbed, it was not otherwise injured. Had the bone been broken, it would have been impossible to have extricated himself, and the horse must have crushed him in its struggles. At least an hour elapsed before he was able to crawl towards the horse, with the intention of

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helping it up; but he then found that its fore-leg was broken above the knee, and its violent struggles rendered any approach within reach of its hoofs dangerous. Watching an opportunity, he placed his knee firmly on its head, plunged his knife deep among the arteries in the side of its neck, and waited until the last feeble gasp and the fixed eye-ball assured him that the animal was dead. With much difficulty he released the saddle, unbuckled the bridle, and putting the former on his head to shield him from the sun, began his painful journey home—a distance which could not be less than three miles.

Until now he had never seemed to feel the heat of the Queensland sun. Many a time he was compelled to lay down his burden and rest, but the increasing stiffness of his leg, and the swelling of his ankle, twisted by the fall, warned him to get on in spite of the pain every step gave him. When nearing the station, Keene caught sight of him, took the saddle, and helped him into Bill's hut. With as much skill as they could command between them, the ankle was

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bound up in bandages torn from a dirty cotton shirt and saturated with water.

The overseer, coming home and not finding the cattle in the yard as he expected, walked over to his hut, and, seeing the plight Harold was in, and hearing the account of the accident, remarked in his cheery, sympathetic way, "Lucky for you, old man, it was no worse. Another horse killed this mustering, too! Won't the boss go it," he laughed. Then, cutting up a pipe of tobacco, he continued reflectively, "Some ugly things do happen in the Bush, and nobody knows what becomes of a man. Eight or ten years ago it was—on the Murrumbidgee I had a job travelling with sheep; and one day my horse shied at something and nearly slung me. Well, I got down to look at it. It was a bundle of rotten clothes, with a man's bones inside. I thought, 'Who is he; and how did he come here? Did the Blacks kill him?' I wondered. Anyhow, the crows and dingoes had been at him. There was the poor chap's head, all the flesh picked off, five or six yards from his body, and one arm was clean gone. I should say he'd

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been there a twelvemonth or more. I turned some of the stuff over in the grass with my foot, to see whether I could make anything out of it; and then it all came across my mind of a sudden. A rusty stirrup-iron with a bit o' the leather was hanging to his boot. Pitched off his horse he was, I warrant, and hung up in the stirrup till he got bashed to death on the ground, when the horse galloped away; and at last the leather broke, and there he was." And Bill lighted his pipe and went off to pick up the cattle where Harold had left them.

For three days Harold kept his bunk, passing the time as well as he could in reading an old copy of the *Field* and bathing his swollen ankle with cold water.

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